JOHNNY LUDLOW

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"EAST LYNNE"

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JOHNNY LUDLOW.

Second Series.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

"Come, read to me some story,
Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
And banish the thoughts of day.

"Such words have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer."

LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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JOHNNY LUDLOW.

I.

ANNE.*

"WHY, what's the matter with *you?*" cried the Squire.

"Matter enough," responded old Coney, who had come hobbling into our house, and sat down with a groan. "If you had the gout in your great toe, Squire, as I've got it in mine, you'd soon feel what the matter was."

"You have been grunting over that gout for days past, Coney!"

"So I have. It won't go in and it won't come out; it stops there on purpose to torment me with perpetual twinges. I have been over to Timberdale Parsonage this morning, and the walk has pretty nigh done for me."

The Squire laughed. We often did laugh at

* This paper, "Anne," ought to have been inserted before some of the papers which have preceeded it, as the events it treats of took place earlier.

Coney's gout : which never seemed to be very bad, or to get beyond incipient "twinges."

"Better have stayed at home and nursed your gout than have pranced off to Timberdale."

"But I had to go," said the farmer. "Jacob Lewis sent for me."

Mr. Coney spoke of Parson Lewis, Rector of Timberdale. At this time the parson was on his last legs, going fast to his rest. His mother and old Coney's mother had been first cousins, which accounted for the intimacy between the parsonage and the farm. It was Eastertide, and we were spending it at Crabb Cot.

"Do you remember Thomas Lewis, the doctor ?" asked old Coney.

"Remember him ! aye, that I do," was the Squire's answer. "What of him ?"

"He has been writing to the parson to take a house for him ; he and his daughter are coming to live in old England again. Poor Lewis can't look out for one himself, so he has put it upon me. And much I can get about, with this lame foot !"

"A house at Timberdale ?"

"Either in the neighbourhood of Timberdale or Crabb, Dr. Lewis writes : or he'd not mind Islip. I saw his letter. Jacob says there's nothing vacant at Timberdale at all likely to suit. We have been thinking of that little place over here, that the people have just gone out of."

"What little place?"

"Maythorn Bank. 'Twould be quite large enough."

"And it's very pretty," added the Squire, "Thomas Lewis coming back! Wonders will never cease. How he could reconcile himself to stay away all his life, I can't tell. Johnny lad, he will like to see you. He and your father were as thick as inkle weavers."

"Aye! Ludlow was a good friend to him while he was doing nothing," nodded old Coney. "As to his staying away, I expect he could not afford to live in England. He has had a legacy left him now, he tells the parson. —What are you asking, Johnny?"

"Did I ever know Dr. Lewis?"

"Not you, lad. Thomas Lewis went abroad ages before you were born, or thought of. Five-and-twenty years he must have been away."

"More than that," said the Squire.

This Thomas Lewis was half-brother to the Rector of Timberdale, but was not related to the Coneys. He served his time, when a boy, to a surgeon at Worcester. In those days young men were apprenticed to doctors just as they were to other trades. Young Lewis was steady and clever; but so weak in health that when he was qualified and ought to have set up on his own account, he could not. People were wondering what would become of him,

for he had no money, when by one of those good chances that rarely fail in time of need, he got a post as travelling companion to a nobleman, rich and sickly, who was going to reside in the warmth of the south of France. They went. It brought up Thomas Lewis's health well; made quite another man of him; and when, a little later, his patron died, he found that he had taken care of his future. He had left the young surgeon a competency of two hundred a year. Mr. Lewis stayed on where he was, married a lady who had some small means, took a foreign medical degree to become Dr. Lewis, and obtained a little practice amidst the English that went to the place in winter. They had been obliged to live frugally, though an income of from two to three hundred a year goes a great deal farther over the water than it does in England: and perhaps the lack of means to travel had kept Dr. Lewis from visiting his native land. Very little had been known of him at home; the letters interchanged by him and the parson were few and far between. Now, it appeared, the doctor had again dropped into a legacy of a few hundred pounds, and was coming back with his daughter—an only child. The wife was dead.

Maythorn Bank, the pretty little place spoken of by Mr. Coney, was taken. It belonged to Sir Robert Tenby. A small, red-brick house, standing in a flower garden, with a delightful

view from its windows of the charming Worcestershire scenery and the Malvern Hills in the distance. Excepting old Coney's great rambling farm-homestead close by, it was the nearest house to our own. But the inside, when it came to be looked at, was found to be in a state of dilapidation, not at all fit for a gentleman's habitation. Sir Robert Tenby was applied to, and he gave directions that it should be put in order.

Before this was completed, the Rector of Timberdale died. He had been suffering from ailments and sorrow for a long while; and in the sweet spring season, the season that he had loved above all other seasons, when the May birds were singing and the May flowers were blooming, he crossed the river that divides us from the eternal shores.

Mr. Coney had to see to the new house then upon his own responsibility; and when it was finished and the workmen were gone out of it, he went over to Worcester, following Dr. Lewis's request, and ordered in a sufficiency of plain furniture. By the middle of June all was ready, a maid-servant engaged, and the doctor and his daughter were at liberty to come when they pleased.

We had just got home for the Midsummer holidays when they arrived. Old Coney took me to the station to meet them; he said there might be parcels to carry. Once, a French lady

had come on a visit to the farm, and she brought with her fifteen small hand-packages and a bandbox.

"And these people are French too, you see, Johnny," reasoned old Coney. "Lewis can't be called anything better, and the girl was born there. Can't even speak English, perhaps. I'm sure he has had time to forget his native tongue."

But they spoke English just as readily and fluently as we did; even the young lady, Anne, had not the slightest foreign accent. And there were no small packages, nothing but three huge trunks and a sort of large reticule, which she carried herself, and would not give up to me. I liked her looks the moment I saw her. You know I always take likes or dislikes. A rather tall girl, light and graceful, with a candid face, a true and sweet voice, and large, soft brown eyes that met mine frankly and fearlessly.

But the doctor! He was like a shadow. A tall man with stooping shoulders; handsome, thin features, hollow cheeks, and scanty hair. But every look and movement bespoke the gentleman; every tone of his low voice was full of considerate courtesy.

"What a poor weak fellow!" lamented old Coney aside to me. "It's just the Thomas Lewis of the years gone by; no health, no stamina. I'm afraid he is only come home to die."

They liked the house, and liked everything in it; and he thanked old Coney very earnestly for the trouble he had taken. I never saw a man, as I learnt later, so considerate for the feelings of others, or so grateful for any little service rendered to himself.

"It is delightful," said Miss Lewis, smiling at me. "I shall call it our little château. And those hills in the distance are the beautiful Malvern Hills that my father has so often told me of!"

"How well you speak English!" I said. "Just as we do."

"Do you suppose I could do otherwise, when my father and my mother were English? It is in truth my native tongue. I think I know England better than France, I have always heard so much of it."

"But you speak French as a native?"

"Oh, of course. German also."

"Ah, I see you are an accomplished young lady, Miss Lewis."

"I am just the opposite," she said, with a laugh. "I never learnt accomplishments. I do not play; I do not sing; I do not draw; I do not—but yes, I do dance: everybody dances in France. Ours was not a rich home, and my dear mother brought me up to be useful in it. I can make my own clothes; I can cook you an omelette, or——"

"Anne, this is Mr. Todhetley," interrupted her father.

The Squire had come in through the open glass doors, round which the jessamine was blooming. When they had talked a bit, he took me up to Dr. Lewis.

"Has Coney told you who he is? William Ludlow's son. You remember *him?*"

"Remember William Ludlow! I must forget myself before I could forget him," was the doctor's answer, as he took both my hands in his and held me before him to look into my eyes. The tears were rising in his own.

"A pleasant face to look at," he was pleased to say. "But they did not name him William?"

"No. We call him Johnny."

"One generation passes away and another springs up in its place. How few, how few of those I knew are now left to welcome me! Even poor Jacob has not stayed."

Tears seemed to be the fashion just then. I turned away, when released, and saw them in Miss Lewis's eyes as she stood against the window-sill, absently playing with the white-flowered jessamine.

"When they begin to speak of those who are gone, it always puts me in mind of mamma," she said, in a whisper, as if she would apologise to me for the tears. "I can't help it."

"Is it long since you lost her?"

"Nearly two years; and home has not been the same to papa since. I do my best; but I am not my mother. I think it was that which

made papa resolve to come to England when he found he could afford it. Home is but triste, you see, when the dearest one it contained has gone out of it."

It struck me that the house could not have had one dearer in it than Anne. She was years and years older than I, but I began to wish she was my sister.

And her manners to the servant were so nice —a homely country girl, named Sally, engaged by Mr. Coney. Miss Lewis told the girl that she hoped she would be happy in her new place, and that she would help her when there was much work to do. Altogether Anne Lewis was a perfect contrast to the fashionable damsels of that day, who could not make themselves out to appear too fine.

The next day was Sunday. We had just finished breakfast, and Mrs. Todhetley was nursing her toothache, when Dr. Lewis came in, looking more shadowy than ever in his black Sunday clothes, with the deep band on his hat. They were going to service at Timberdale, and he wanted me to go with them.

"Of course I have not forgotten the way to Timberdale," said he; "but there's an odd, shy feeling upon me of not liking to walk about the old place by myself. Anne is strange to it also. We shall soon get used to it, I dare say. Will you go, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir.'

"Crabb church is close by, Lewis," remarked the Squire, "and it's a steaming hot day."

"But I must go to Timberdale this morning. It was poor Jacob's church, you know, for many years. And though he is no longer there, I should like to see the desk and pulpit which he filled."

"Aye, to be sure," readily acquiesced the Squire. "I'd go with you myself, Lewis, but for the heat."

Dr. Lewis said he should take the roadway, not the short cut through Crabb Ravine. It was a good round, and we had to start early. I liked Anne better than ever: no one could look nicer than she did in her trim black dress. As we walked along, Dr. Lewis frequently halted to recognise old scenes, and ask me was it this place, or that.

"That fine place out yonder?" he cried, stopping to point to a large stone house half a mile off the road, partly hidden amidst its beautiful grounds. "I ought to know whose it is. Let me see!"

"It is Sir Robert Tenby's seat—Bellwood. Your landlord, sir."

"Aye, to be sure—Bellwood. In my time it was Sir George's, though."

"Sir George died five or six years ago."

"Has Sir Robert any family? He must be middle-aged now."

"I think he is forty-five, or so. He is not married."

"Does he chiefly live here?"

"About half his time; the rest he spends at his house in London. He lives very quietly. We all like Sir Robert."

We sat in the rector's pew, having it to ourselves. Herbert Tanerton did the duty, and gave a good sermon. Nobody yet was appointed to the vacant living, which was in Sir Robert Tenby's gift. Herbert, meanwhile, took charge of the parish, and many people thought he would get it—as he did, later.

The Bellwood pew faced the rector's, and Sir Robert sat in it alone. A fine-looking man, with greyish hair, and a homely face that you took to at once. He seemed to pay the greatest attention to Herbert Tanerton's sermon; possibly was deliberating whether he was worthy of the living, or not. In the pew behind him sat Mrs. Macbean, an old lady who had been housekeeper at Bellwood during two generations; and the Bellwood servants sat farther down.

We were talking to Herbert Tanerton outside the church after service, when Sir Robert came up and spoke to the parson. He, Herbert, introduced Dr. Lewis to him as the late rector's brother. Sir Robert shook hands with him at once, smiled pleasantly at Anne, and nodded to me as he continued his way.

"Do you like your house?" asked Herbert.

"I shall like it by-and-by, no doubt," was the doctor's answer. "I should like it now but for the paint. The smell is dreadful."

"Oh, that will soon go off," cried Herbert.

"Yes, I hope so: or I fear it will make me ill."

In going back we took Crabb Ravine, and were at home in no time. They asked me to stay dinner, and I did so. We had a loin of lamb, and a raspberry tart, if anybody's curious to know. Dr. Lewis had taken a fancy to me: I don't know why, unless it was that he had liked my father; and I'm sure I had taken one to them. But the paint did smell badly, and that's the truth.

In all my days I don't think I ever saw a man so incapable as Dr. Lewis; so helpless as to the common affairs of life. What he would have done without Anne, I know not. He was just fit to sit down and be led like a child; to have said to him—Come here, go there; do this, do the other. Therefore, when he asked me to run in in the morning and see if he wanted anything, I was not surprised. Anne thought he might be glad of my shoulder to lean upon when he walked about the garden.

It was past eleven when I got there, for I had to do an errand first of all for the Squire. Anne was kneeling down in the parlour amidst a lot of small cuttings of plants which she had brought from France. They lay on the carpet on pieces

of paper. She wore a fresh white cotton gown, with black dots upon it, and a black bow at the throat; and she looked nicer than ever.

"Look here, Johnny; I don't know what to do. The labels have all come off, and I can't tell which is which. I suppose I did not fasten them on securely. Sit down—if you can find a chair."

The chairs and tables were strewed with books, most of them French, and other small articles, just unpacked. I did not want a chair, but knelt down beside her, asking if I could help. She said no, and that she hoped to be straight by the morrow. The doctor had stepped out, she did not know where, "to escape the smell of the paint."

I was deep in the pages of one of the books, "Les Contes de ma Bonne," which Anne said was a great favourite of hers, though it was meant for children; and she had her head, as before, bent over the green sprigs and labels, when a shadow, passing the open glass doors, glanced in and halted. I supposed it must be the doctor; but it was Sir Robert Tenby. Up I started; Anne did the same quietly, and quietly invited him in.

"I walked over to see Dr. Lewis, and to ask whether the house requires anything else done to it," he explained. "And I had to come early, as I am leaving the neighbourhood this afternoon."

"Oh, thank you," said Anne, "it is very kind of you to come. Will you please to sit down, sir?" hastily taking the books off a chair. "Papa is out, but I think he will not be long."

"Are you satisfied with the house?" he asked.

"Quite so, sir; and I do not think it wants anything done to it at all. I hope you will not suppose we shall keep it in this state," she added, rather anxiously. "When things are being unpacked, the rooms are sure to look untidy."

Sir Robert smiled. "You seem very notable, Miss Lewis."

"Oh, I do everything," she answered, smiling back. "There is nobody else."

He had not taken the chair, but went out, saying he should probably meet Dr. Lewis—leaving a message for him, about the house, in case he did not.

"He is your great and grand man of the neighbourhood, is he not, Johnny?" said Anne, as she knelt down on the carpet again.

"Oh, he is grand enough."

"Then don't you think he is, considering that fact, very pleasant and affable? I'm sure he is as simple and free in manners and speech as we are."

"Most grand men—if they are truly great—are that. Your upstarts assume no end of airs."

"I know who will never assume airs, Johnny. He has none in him."

"Who's that?"

"Yourself."

It made me laugh. I had nothing to assume them for.

It was either that afternoon or the following one that Dr. Lewis came up to the Squire and old Coney as they were talking together in the road. He told them that he could not possibly stay in the house; he should be laid up if he did; he must go away until the smell from the paint was gone. That he was looking ill, both saw; and they believed he did not complain without cause.

The question was, where could he go? Mr. Coney hospitably offered him house-room; but the doctor, while thanking him, said the smell might last a long while, and he should prefer to be independent. He had been thinking of going with Anne to Worcester for a time. Did they know of lodgings there?

"Better go to an hotel," said the Squire. "No trouble at an hotel."

"But hotels are not always comfortable. I cannot feel at home in them," argued the poor doctor. "And they cost too much besides."

"You might chance to hit upon lodgings where you'd not be any more comfortable, Lewis. And they'd be very dull for you."

"There's Lake's boarding-house," put in old

Coney, while the doctor was looking blank and helpless.

"A boarding-house? Aye, that might do, if it's not a noisy one."

"It's not noisy at all," cried the Squire. "It's uncommonly well conducted: sometimes there are not three visitors in the house. You and Miss Lewis would be comfortable there."

And for Lake's boarding-house Dr. Lewis and Anne took their departure on the very next day. If they had but foreseen the trouble their stay at it would lead to!

Lake's boarding-house stood near the cathedral. A roomy house, with rather shabby furniture in it: but in boarding.houses and lodgings people don't, as a rule, look for gilded chairs and tables. Some years before, Mrs. Lake, the wife of a professional man, and a gentlewoman, was suddenly left a widow with four infant children, boys, and nothing to keep them upon. What to do she did not know. And it often puzzles me to think what such poor ladies *do* do, left in similar straits.

She had her furniture; and that was about all. Friends suggested that she should take a house in a likely situation, and try for some lady boarders; or perhaps for some of the college boys, whose homes lay at a distance. Not to make too long a story of it, it was what

she did do. And she had been in the house ever since, struggling on (for these houses mostly do entail a struggle), sometimes flourishing in numbers, sometimes down in the dumps with empty rooms. But she had managed to bring the children up: the two elder ones were out in the world, the two younger were still in the college school. Mrs. Lake was a meek little woman, ever distracted with practical cares, especially as to stews and gravies: Miss Dinah Lake (her late husband's sister, and a majestic lady of middle age), who lived with her, chiefly saw to the company.

But now, would anybody believe that Dr. Lewis was "that shy," as their maid, Sally, expressed it—or perhaps you would rather call it helpless—that he begged the Squire to let me go with him to Lake's. Otherwise he should be lost, he said; and Anne, accustomed to French ways and habits, could not be of much use to him in a strange boarding-house: Johnny knew the house, and would feel at home there.

When Captain Sanker and his wife (if you have not forgotten them) first came to Worcester, they stayed at Lake's while fixing on a residence, and that's how we became tolerably well acquainted with the Lakes. This year that I am now telling of was the one that preceded the accident to King Sanker, told of in the last volume. And, in point of rotation, this paper ought to have appeared first.

So I went with Dr. Lewis and Anne. It was late in the afternoon when we reached Worcester, close upon the dinner-hour—which was five o'clock, and looked upon as quite a fashionable hour in those days. The dinner-bell had rung, and the company had filed into dinner when we got downstairs.

But there was not much company staying in the house. Mrs. Lake did not appear at dinner, and Miss Dinah Lake took the head of the table. It happened more often than not that Mrs. Lake was in the kitchen, superintending the dishing-up of the dinner and seeing to the ragouts and sauces; especially upon the advent of fresh inmates, when the fare would be unusually plentiful. Mrs. Lake often said she was a "born cook;" which was lucky, as she could not afford to keep first-rate servants.

Miss Dinah sat at the head of the table, in a rustling green gown and primrose satin cap. Having an income of her own she could afford to dress. (Mrs. Lake's best gown was black silk, thin and scanty.) Next to Miss Dinah sat a fair, plump little woman, with round green eyes and a soft voice: at any rate, a soft way of speaking: who was introduced to us as Mrs. Captain Podd. She in turn introduced her daughters, Miss Podd and Miss Fanny Podd: both fair like their mother, and with the same kind of round green eyes. A Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell completed the company; two silent people who seemed to do nothing but eat.

Dr. Lewis sat by Mrs. Captain Podd : and very pleasant and attentive the doctor found her. He was shy as well as helpless ; but she talked to him freely in her low soft voice and put him altogether at his ease. My place chanced to be next to Miss Fanny Podd's : and she began at once to put me at my ease, as her mother was putting the doctor.

"You are a stranger here, at the dinner-table," observed Miss Fanny ; "but we shall be good friends presently. People in this house soon become sociable."

"I am glad of that."

"I did not quite hear your name. Did you catch mine ?—Fanny Podd."

"Yes. Thank you. Mine is Ludlow."

"I suppose you never were at Worcester before ?"

"Oh, I know Worcester very well indeed. I live in Worcestershire."

"Why !" cried the young lady, neglecting her soup to stare at me, "we heard you had just come over from living in France. Miss Dinah said so—that old guy at the top, yonder."

"Dr. and Miss Lewis have just come from France. Not I. I know Miss Dinah Lake very well."

"Do you ! Don't go and tell her I called her an old guy. Mamma wants to keep in with Miss Dinah, or she might be disagreeable. What a stupid town Worcester is !"

"Perhaps you do not know many people in it."

"We don't know anybody. We had been staying last in a garrison town. That was pleasant: so many nice officers about. You could not go to the window but there'd be some in sight. Here nobody seems to pass by but a crew of staid old parsons."

"We are near the cathedral; that's why you see so many parsons. Are you going to remain long in Worcester?"

"That's just as the fancy takes mamma. We have been here already six or seven weeks."

"Have you no settled home?"

Miss Fanny Podd pursed up her lips and shook her head. "We like change best. A settled home would be wretchedly dull. Ours was given up when papa died."

Thus she entertained me to the end of dinner. We all left the table together—wine was not in fashion at Lake's. Those who wanted any had to provide it for themselves: but the present company seemed to be satisfied with the home-brewed ale. Mrs. Captain Podd put her arm playfully into that of Dr. Lewis, and said she would show him the way to the drawing-room.

And so it went on all the evening: she making herself agreeable to the doctor: Miss Podd to Anne; Fanny to me. Of course it was highly good-natured of them. Mrs. Podd

discovered that the doctor liked backgammon; and she looked for a moment as cross as a wasp on finding there was no board in the house.

"Quite an omission, my dear Miss Dinah," she said, smoothing away the frown with a sweet smile. "I thought a backgammon-board was as necessary to a house as are chairs and tables."

"Mrs. Lake had a board once," said Miss Dinah; "but the boys got possession of it, and somehow it was broken. We have chess—and cribbage."

"Would you like a hand at cribbage, my dear sir?" asked Mrs. Podd of the doctor.

"Don't play it, ma'am," said he.

"Ah"—with a little drawn-out sigh. "Julia, love, would you mind singing one of your quiet songs? Or a duet. Fanny, sweetest, try a quiet duet with your sister. Go to the piano."

If they called the duet quiet, I wondered what they'd call noisy. You might have heard it over at the cathedral. Their playing and singing was of the style known as "showy." Some people admire it: but it is a good thing ear-drums are not easily cracked.

The next day Mrs. Podd made the house a present of a backgammon-board: and in the evening she and Dr. Lewis sat down to play. Our number had decreased, for Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell had left; and Mrs. Lake dined with us, taking the foot of the table. Miss Dinah always, I found, kept the head.

"She is so much better calculated to preside than I am," whispered meek Mrs. Lake to me later in the evening; as, happening to pass the kitchen-door after dinner, I saw her in there, making the coffee. "What should I do without Dinah!"

"But need you come out to make the coffee, Mrs. Lake?"

"My dear, when I leave it to the servants, it is not drinkable. I am rather sorry Mrs. Podd makes a point of having coffee in an evening. Our general rule is to give only tea."

"I'd not give in to Mrs. Podd."

"Well, dear, we like to be accommodating when we can. Being my cousin, she orders things more freely than our ladies usually do. Dinah calls her exacting; but——"

"Is Mrs. Podd your cousin?" I interrupted, in surprise.

"My first cousin. Did you not know it? Her mother and my mother were sisters."

"The girls don't call you 'aunt.'"

"They do sometimes when we are alone. I suppose they think I am beneath them—keeping a boarding-house."

I had not much liked the Podds at first: as the days went on I liked them less. They were not sincere: I was quite sure of it; Mrs. Podd especially. But the manner in which she had taken Dr. Lewis under her wing was marvellous. He began to think he could not move without

her: he was as one who has found a sheet-anchor. She took trouble of all kinds from him: her chief aim seemed to be to make his life pass pleasantly. She'd order a carriage and take him for a drive in it; she'd parade the High Street on his arm; she'd sit with him in the Green within the enclosure, though Miss Dinah told her one day she had not the right of entrance to it; she'd walk him off to inspect the monuments in the cathedral, and talk with him in the cloisters of the old days when Cromwell stabled his horses there. After dinner they would play backgammon till bed time. And with it all, she was so gay and sweet and gentle, that Dr. Lewis thought she must be a very angel come out of heaven.

"Johnny, I don't like her," said Anne to me one day. "She seems to take papa completely out of my hands. She makes him feel quite independent of me."

"You like her as well as I do, Anne."

"This morning I found him in the drawing-room; alone, for a wonder: he was gazing up in his abstracted way, as if wanting to discover what the pinnacles of the cathedral were made of, which look to be so close, you know, from the windows of that room. 'Papa, you are lonely,' I said. 'Would you like to walk out?—or what would you like to do?' 'My dear, Mrs. Podd will see to it all,' he answered; 'don't trouble yourself; I am waiting for her.' It is just as though he had no more need of me."

"Anne Lewis turned away to hide her wet eyelashes. For my part, I thought the sooner Mrs. Captain Podd betook herself from Lake's boarding-house, the better. It was too much of a good thing.

That same afternoon I heard some conversation not meant for me. Behind the house was a square patch of ground called a garden, containing a few trees and some sweet herbs. I was sitting on the bench there, underneath the high, old-fashioned dining-room windows, thinking how hot the sun was, wishing for something to do, and wondering when Dr. Lewis meant to send me home. He and Mrs. Podd were out together; Anne was in the kitchen, teaching Mrs. Lake some mysteries of French cookery. Miss Dinah sat in the dining-room, in her spectacles, darning table-cloths.

"Oh, have you come in!" I suddenly heard her say, as the door opened. And it was Mrs. Podd's voice which answered.

"The sun is so very hot: poor dear Dr. Lewis felt quite ill. He is gone up to his room for half an hour to sit quietly in the shade. Where are my girls?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Miss Dinah: and it struck me that her tone of voice was rather crusty. "Mrs. Podd, I must again ask you when you will let me have some money?"

"As soon as I can," said Mrs. Podd: who seemed, by the sound, to have thrown herself

upon a chair, and to be fanning her face with a rustling newspaper.

"But you have said that for some weeks. When is the 'soon' to be?"

"You know I have been disappointed in my remittances. It is really too hot for talking."

"I know that you say you have. But we cannot go on without some money. The expenses of this house are heavy: how are they to be kept up if our guests don't pay us? Indeed you must let me have part of your account, if not all."

"My dear sweet creature, the house is not yours," returned Mrs. Podd, in her most honeyed accents.

"I manage it," said Miss Dinah, "and am responsible for the getting-in of the accounts. You know that our custom is to be paid weekly."

"Exactly, dear Miss Dinah. But I am sure that my cousin, Emma Lake, would not wish to inconvenience me. I am indebted to her; not to you; and I will pay her as soon as I can. My good creature, how *can* you sit stewing over that plain sewing this sultry afternoon!"

"I am obliged to," responded Miss Dinah. "We have not money to spend on new linen: trouble enough, it is, I can assure you, to keep the old decent."

"I should get somebody to help me. That young woman, Miss Lewis, might do it: she seems to have been used to all kinds of work."

"I wish you would shut that door: you have

left it open," retorted Miss Dinah: "I don't like sitting in a draught, though it is hot. And I must beg of you to understand, Mrs. Podd, that we really cannot continue to keep you and your daughters here unless you can manage to give us a little money."

By the shutting of the door and the silence that ensued, it was apparent that Mrs. Podd had departed, leaving Miss Dinah to her table-cloths. But now, this had surprised me. For, to hear Mrs. Captain Podd and her daughters talk, and to see the way in which they dressed, one could not have supposed they were ever at a fault for ready cash.

At the end of ten days I went home. Dr. Lewis no longer wanted me: he had Mrs. Podd. And I think it must have been about ten days after that, that we heard the doctor and Anne were returning. The paint smelt still, but not as badly as before.

They did not come alone. Mrs. Podd and her two daughters accompanied them to spend the day. Mrs. Podd was in a ravishing new toilette; and I hoped Lake's boarding-house had been paid.

Mrs. Podd went into raptures over Maythorn Bank, paint and all. It was the sweetest little place she had ever been in, she said, and some trifling, judicious care would convert it into a paradise.

I know who had the present care; and that

was Anne. They got over about twelve o'clock; and as soon as she had seen the ladies' things off, and they comfortably installed in the best parlour, its glass doors standing open to the fragrant flower-beds, she put on a big apron in the kitchen and helped Sally to get the dinner.

"Need you do it, Anne?" I said, running in, having seen her crumbling bread as I passed the window.

"Yes, I must, Johnny. Papa bade me have a nice dinner served to-day: and Sally is inexperienced, you know. She can roast and boil, but she knows nothing about the little dishes he likes. To tell you the truth," added Anne, glancing meaningly into my eyes for a moment, "I would rather be cooking here than talking with them there."

"Are you sorry to leave Worcester?"

"Yes, and no," she answered. "Sorry to leave Mrs. Lake and Miss Dinah, for I like them both: glad to be at home again and to have papa to myself. I shall not cry if we never see Mrs. Podd again. Perhaps I am mistaken; and I'm sure I did not think that the judging of others uncharitably was one of my faults; but I cannot help thinking that she has tried to estrange papa from me. I suppose it is her way: she cannot have any real wish to do it. However, she goes back to-night, and then it will be over."

"Who is at Lake's now?"

"Nobody—except the Podds. I am sorry, for I fear they have some difficulty to make both ends meet."

Was it over! Anne Lewis reckoned without her host.

I was running in to Maythorn Bank the next morning, when I saw the shimmer of Anne's white garden-bonnet and her morning dress amidst the raspberry-bushes, and turned aside to greet her. She had a basin in her hand, picking the fruit, and the hot tears were running down her cheeks. Conceal her distress she could not; any attempt would have been worse than futile.

"Oh, Johnny, she is going to marry him!" cried she, with a burst of sobs.

"Going to marry him!—who? what?" I asked, taking the basin from her hand: for I declare that the truth did not strike me.

"*She* is. Mrs. Podd. She is going to marry papa."

For a moment she held her face against the apple-tree. The words confounded me. More real grief I had never seen. My heart ached for her.

"Don't think me selfish," she said, turning presently, trying to subdue the sobs and wiping the tears away. "I hope I am not that: or undutiful. It is not for myself that I grieve; indeed it is not; but for him."

I knew that.

"If I could but think it would be for his happiness! But oh, I fear it will not be. Something seems to tell me that it will not. And if—he should be—uncomfortable afterwards — miserable afterwards!—I think the distress would kill me."

"Is it *true*, Anne? How did you hear it?"

"*True!* Too true, Johnny. At breakfast this morning papa said, 'We shall be dull today without our friends, Anne.' I told him I hoped not, and that I would go out with him, or read to him, or do anything else he liked: and I reminded him of his small stock of choice books that he used to be so fond of. 'Yes, yes, we shall be very dull, you and I alone in this strange house,' he resumed. 'I have been thinking for some time we should be, Anne, and so I have asked that dear, kind, lively woman to come to us for good.' I did not understand him; I did not indeed, Johnny; and papa went on to explain. 'You must know that I allude to Mrs. Podd, Anne,' he said. 'When I saw her so charmed with this house yesterday, and we were talking about my future loneliness in it—and she lamented it, even to tears—one word led to another, and I felt encouraged to venture to ask her to share it and be my wife. And so, my dear, it is all settled; and I trust it will be for the happiness of us all. She is a most delightful woman, and will make the sun-

shine of any home.' I wish I could think it!" concluded Anne.

"No, don't take the basin," I said, as she went to do so. "I'll finish picking the raspberries. What are they for?"

"A pudding. Papa said he should like one."

"Why could not Sally pick them? Country girls are used to the sun."

"Sally is busy. Papa bade her clear out that room where our boxes were put: we shall want all the rooms now. Oh, Johnny, I wish we had not left France! Those happy days will never come again."

Was the doctor going into his dotage? The question crossed my mind. It might never have occurred to *me;* but one day at Worcester Miss Dinah had asked it in my hearing. I felt very uncomfortable, could not think of anything soothing to say to Anne, and went on picking the raspberries.

"How many do you want? Are these enough?"

"Yes," she answered, looking at the lot. "I must fill the basin up with currants."

We were bending over a currant-bush, Anne holding up a branch and I stripping it, when footsteps on the path close by made us both look up hastily. There stood Sir Robert Tenby. He stared at the distress on Anne's face, which was too palpable to be concealed, and asked without ceremony what was amiss.

It was the last feather that broke the camel's back. These words from a stranger, and his evident concern, put the finishing touch to Anne's state. She burst into more bitter tears than she had yet shed, and for a minute sobbed piteously.

"Is it any trouble that I can help you out of?" asked Sir Robert, in the kindest tones, feeling, no doubt, as sorry as he looked. "Oh, my dear young lady, don't give way like this!"

Touched by his sympathy, her heart seemed to open to him: perhaps she had need of finding consolation somewhere. Drying her tears, Anne told her story simply: commenting on it as she had commented to me.

"It is for my father's sake that I grieve, sir; that I fear. I feel sure Mrs. Podd will not make him really happy."

"Well, well, we must hope for the best," spoke Sir Robert, who looked a little astonished at hearing the nature of the grievance, and perhaps thought Anne's distress more exaggerated than it need have been. "Dr. Lewis wrote to me last night about some alteration he wants to make in the garden; I am come to speak to him of it."

"Alteration in the garden!" mechanically repeated Anne. "I have heard nothing about it."

He passed into the house to the doctor. We picked on at the currants, and then took them into

the kitchen. Anne sat down on a chair to strip them from their stalks. Presently we saw Sir Robert and the doctor at one end of the garden, the latter drawing boundaries round a corner with his walking-stick.

"Oh, I know," exclaimed Anne. "Yesterday Mrs. Podd suggested that a summer-house in that spot would be a delightful improvement. But I never, never could have supposed papa meant to act upon the suggestion."

Just so. Dr. Lewis wished to erect a summer-house of wood and trellis-work, but had not liked to do it without first speaking to his landlord.

As the days went on, Anne grew to feel somewhat reassured. She was very busy, for all kinds of preparations had to be made in the house, and the wedding was to take place at once.

"I think, perhaps, I took it up in a wrong light, Johnny," she said to me one day, when I went in and found her sewing at some new curtains. "I hope I did. It must have been the suddenness of the news, I suppose, and that I was so very unprepared for it."

"How do you mean? In what wrong light?"

"Nobody seems to think ill of it, or to foresee cause for apprehension. I am so glad. I don't think I ever can much like her: but if she makes papa happy, it is all I ask."

"Who has been talking about it?"

"Herbert Tanerton, for one. He saw Mrs. Podd at Worcester last week, and thought her charming. The very woman, he said, to do papa good; lively and full of resource. So it may all be for the best."

I should as soon have expected an invitation to the moon as to the wedding. But I got it. Dr. Lewis, left to himself, was feeling helpless again, and took me with him to Worcester on the eve of the happy day. We put up at the Bell Hotel for the night; but Anne went direct to Lake's boarding-house. I ran down there in the evening.

Whether an inkling of the coming wedding had got abroad, I can't say; it was to be kept private, and had been, so far as anybody knew: but Lake's house was full, not a room to be had in it for love or money. Anne was put in a sleeping-closet two yards square.

"It is not our fault," spoke Miss Dinah, openly. "We were keeping a room for Miss Lewis; but on Monday last when a stranger came, wanting to be taken in, Mrs. Podd told us Miss Lewis was going to the hotel with her father."

"My dear love, I thought you were," chimed in Mrs. Podd, as she patted Anne on the shoulder. "I must have mis-read a passage in your dear papa's letter, and so caught up the misapprehension. Never mind: you shall dress

in my room if your own is not large enough. And I am sure all young ladies ought to be obliged to me, for the new inmate is a delightful man. My daughters find him charming."

"The room is quite large enough, thank you," replied Anne, meekly.

"Do you approve of the wedding, Miss Dinah?" I asked her later, when we were alone in the dining-room. "Do you like it?"

Miss Dinah, who was counting a heap of glasses on the sideboard that the maid had just washed and brought in, counted to the end, and then began upon the spoons.

"It is the only way we can keep our girls in check," observed she; "otherwise they'd break and lose all before them. I know how many glasses have been used at table, consequently how many go out to be washed, and the girl has to bring that same number in, or explain the reason why. As to the spoons, they get thrown away with the dishwater and sometimes into the fire. If they were silver it would be all the same."

"Do you like the match, Miss Dinah?"

"Johnny Ludlow," she said, turning round to face me, "we make a point in this house of not expressing our likes and dislikes. Our position is peculiar, you know. When people have come to years of discretion, and are of the age that Mrs. Podd is, not to speak of Dr. Lewis's, we must suppose them to be capable of judging and

acting for themselves. We have not helped on the match by so much as an approving word or look: on the other hand, it has not lain in our duty or in our power to retard it."

Which was, of course, good sense. But for all her caution, I fancied she could have spoken against it, had she chosen.

A trifling incident occurred to me in going back to the Bell. Rushing round the corner into Broad Street, a tall, well-dressed man, sauntering on before me, suddenly turned on his heel, and threw away his cigar sideways. It caught the front of my shirt. I flung it off again; but not before it had burnt a small hole in the linen.

"I beg your pardon," said the smoker, in a courteous voice—and there was no mistaking him for anything but a gentleman. "I am very sorry. It was frightfully careless of me."

"Oh, it is nothing; don't think about it," I answered, making off at full speed.

St. Michael's Church stood in a nook under the cathedral walls: it is taken down now. It was there that the wedding took place. Dr. Lewis arrived at it more like a baby than a bridegroom, helpless and nervous to a painful degree. But Mrs. Podd made up for his deficiencies in her grand self-possession; her white bonnet and nodding feather seemed to fill the church. Anne wore grey silk; Julia and Fanny Podd some shining pink stuff that their petti-

coats could be seen through. Poor Anne's tears were dropping during the service ; she kept her head bent down to hide them.

"Look up, Anne," I said from my place close to her. "Take courage."

"I can't help it, indeed, Johnny," she whispered. "I wish I could. I'm sure I'd not throw a damp on the general joy for the world."

The wedding-party was a very small one indeed; just ourselves and a stern-looking gentleman, who was said to be a lawyer-cousin of the Podds, and to come from Birmingham. All the people staying at Lake's had flocked into the church to look on.

"Pray take my arm. Allow me to lead you out. I see how deeply you are feeling this."

The ceremony seemed to be over almost as soon as it was begun—perhaps the parson, remembering the parties had both been married before, cut it short. And it was in the slight bustle consequent upon its termination that the above words, in a low, tender, and most considerate tone, broke upon my ear. Where had I heard the voice before ?

Turning hastily round, I recognised the stranger of the night before. It was to Anne he had spoken, and he had already taken her upon his arm. Her head was bent still ; the rebellious tears would hardly be kept back ; and a sweet compassion sat on every line of his handsome features as he gazed down at her.

"Who is he?" I asked of Fanny Podd, as he walked forward with Anne.

"Mr. Angerstyne—the most fascinating man I ever saw in my life. The Lakes could not have taken him in, but for mamma's inventing that little fable of Anne's going with old Lewis to the Bell. Trust mamma for not letting us two girls lose a chance," added free-speaking Fanny. "I may take your arm, I suppose, Johnny Ludlow."

And after a plain breakfast in private, which included only the wedding-party, Dr. and Mrs. Lewis departed for Cheltenham.

PART THE SECOND.

"JOHNNY, what can I do? What do you *think* I can do?"

In the pretty grey silk that she had worn at her father's wedding, and with a whole world of perplexity in her soft brown eyes, Anne Lewis stood by me, and whispered the question. As soon as the bride and bridegroom had driven off, Anne was to depart for Maythorn Bank, with Julia and Fanny Podd; all three of them to remain there for the few days that Dr. and Mrs. Lewis purposed to be away. But now, no sooner had the sound of the bridal wheels died on our ears, and Anne had suggested that they should get ready for their journey home,

than they two young ladies burst into a laugh, and said, *Did* she think they were going off to that dead-and-alive place! Not if they knew it. And, giving her an emphatic nod to prove they meant what they said, they waltzed to the other end of the room in their shining pink dresses to talk to Mr. Angerstyne.

Consternation sat in every line of Anne's face. "I cannot go there by myself, or stay there by myself," she said to me. "These things are not done in France."

No: though Maythorn Bank was her own home, and though she was as thoroughly English as a girl can be, it could not be done. French customs and ideas did not permit it, and she had been brought up in them. It was certainly not nice behaviour of the girls. They should have objected before their mother left.

"*I* don't know what you can do, Anne. Better ask Miss Dinah."

"Not go with you, after the arrangements are made—and your servant Sally is expecting you all!" cried Miss Dinah Lake. "Oh, you must be mistaken," she added; and went up to talk to them. Julia only laughed.

"Go to be buried alive at Maythorn Bank as long as mamma chooses to stay away!" she cried. "You'll not get either of us to do anything of the kind, Miss Dinah."

"Mrs. Podd—I mean Mrs. Lewis—will be

back to join you there in less than a week," said Miss Dinah.

"Oh, will she, though! You don't know mamma. She may be off to Paris and fifty other places before she turns her head homewards again. Anne Lewis can go home by herself, if she wants to go: I and Fanny mean to stay with you, Miss Dinah."

So Anne had to stay also. She sat down and wrote two letters: one to Sally, saying their coming home was delayed; the other to Dr. Lewis, asking what she was to do.

"And the gain is mine," observed Mr. Angerstyne. "What would the house have been without you?"

He appeared to speak to the girls generally. But his eyes and his smile evidently were directed to Anne. She saw it too, and blushed. Blushed! when she had not yet known him four-and-twenty hours. But he was just the fellow for a girl to fall in love with—and no disparagement to her to say so.

"Who is he?" I that evening asked Miss Dinah.

"A Mr. Angerstyne," she answered. "I don't know much of him, except that he is an independent gentleman with a beautiful estate in Essex, and a fashionable man. I see what you are thinking, Johnny: that it is curious a man of wealth and fashion should be staying at Lake's boarding-house. But Mr. Angerstyne

came over from Malvern to see Captain Bristow, the old invalid, who keeps his room upstairs, and when here the Captain persuaded him to stay for a day or two, if we could give him a room. That's how it was. Captain Bristow leaves us soon, and I suppose Mr. Angerstyne will be leaving too."

I had expected to go home the following day; but that night up came two of the young Sankers, Dan and King, and said I was to go and stay a bit with them. Leave to do so was easily had from home; for just as our school at old Frost's was re-assembling, two boys who had stayed the holidays were taken with bad throats, and we were not to go back till goodness knew when. Tod, who was on a visit in Gloucestershire, thought it would be Michaelmas.

Back came letters from Cheltenham. Mrs. Lewis told her girls they might remain at Worcester if they liked. And Dr. Lewis wrote to Anne, saying she must not go home alone, and he enclosed a note to Mrs. Lake, asking her to be so kind as to take care of his daughter.

After that we had a jolly time. The Sankers and Lakes amalgamated well, and were always at one another's houses. This does not apply to Mrs. Lake and Miss Dinah: as Miss Dinah put it, they had no time for gadding down to Sankers'. But Mr. Angerstyne (who had not left) grew quite familiar there; the Sankers, who never stood on the slightest ceremony,

making no stranger of him. Captain Sanker discovered that two or three former naval chums of his were known to Mr. Angerstyne; one dead old gentleman in particular, who had been his bosom friend. This was quite enough. Mr. Angerstyne had, so to say, the key of the house given him, and went in and out of it at will.

Everybody liked Mr. Angerstyne. And for all the pleasurable excursions that now fell to our lot, we were indebted to him. Without being ostentatious, he opened his purse freely; and there was a delicacy in his manner of doing it that prevented its being felt. On the plea of wanting, himself, to see some noted spot or place in the neighbourhood, he would order a large post-carriage from the Star or the Crown, and invite as many as it would hold to accompany him, and bring baskets of choice fruit, or dainties from the pastry-cook's to regale us on. Or he would tell the Sankers that King looked delicate: poor lame King, who was to die ere another year had flown. Down would come the carriage, ostensibly to take King for a drive; and a lot of us reaped the benefit. Mrs. Sanker was always of the party: without a chaperon, the young ladies could not have gone. Generally speaking the Miss Podds would come—*they* took care of that: and Anne Lewis always came—which I think Mr. Angerstyne took care of. The golden page of life was opening for Anne Lewis: she seemed to be

entering on an Elysian pathway, every step of which was strewn with flowers.

One day we went to Holt Fleet. The carriage came down to the Sankers' in the morning, Mr. Angerstyne in it, and the Captain stepped out of doors, his face beaming, to see the start. Once in a way he would be of the party himself, but not often. Mr. Angerstyne handed Mrs. Sanker in, and then called out for me. I held back, feeling uncomfortable at being always taken, and knowing that Fred and Dan thought me selfish for it. But it was of no use: Mr. Angerstyne had a way of carrying out his own will.

"Get up on the box, Johnny," he said to me. And, close upon my heels, wanting to share the box with me, came Dan Sanker. Mr. Angerstyne pulled him back.

"Not you, Dan. I shall take King."

"King has been ever so many times—little wretch!" grumbled Dan. "It's my turn. It's not fair, Mr. Angerstyne."

"You, Dan, and Fred, and Toby, all the lot of you, shall have a carriage to yourselves for a whole day if you like, but King goes with me," said Mr. Angerstyne, helping the lad up.

He got in himself, took his seat by Mrs. Sanker, and the post-boy touched up his horses. Mrs. Sanker, mildly delighted, for she liked these drives, sat in her ordinary costume: a fancy shawl of some thick kind of silk crape, all the

colours of the rainbow blended into its pattern, and a black velvet bonnet with a turned-up brim and a rose in it, beneath which her light hair hung down in loose curls.

We stopped at Lake's boarding-house to take up the three girls; who got in, and sat on the seat opposite Mrs. Sanker and Mr. Angerstyne: and then the post-boy started for Holt Fleet. "The place is nothing," observed Captain Sanker, who had suggested it as an easy, pleasant drive to Mr. Angerstyne; "but the inn is comfortable, and the garden's nice to sit or stroll in."

We reached Holt Fleet at one o'clock. The first thing Mr. Angerstyne did was to order luncheon, anything they could conveniently give us, and to serve it in the garden. It proved to be ham and eggs; first-rate; we were all hungry, and he bade them keep on frying till further orders. At which the girl who waited on us laughed, as she drew the corks of some bottled perry.

I saw a bit of by-play later. Strolling about to digest the ham and eggs, some in one part of the grounds, which in places had a wild and picturesque aspect, some in another, Mr. Angerstyne suddenly laid hold of Anne, as if to save her from falling. She was standing in that high narrow pathway that is perched up aloft and looks so dangerous, steadying herself by a tree, and bending cautiously forwards to look down. The path may be gone now. The features of

the whole place may be altered; perhaps even done away with altogether; for I am writing of years and years ago. He stole up and caught her by the waist.

"Oh, Mr. Angerstyne!" she exclaimed, blushing and starting.

"Were you going to take a leap?"

"No, no," she smiled. "Would it kill me if I did?"

"Suppose I let you go—and send you over to try it?"

Ah, he would not do that. He was holding her all too safely. Anne made an effort to free herself; but her eyelids drooped over her telltale eyes, her all-conscious face betrayed what his presence was to her.

"How beautiful the river is from this, as we look up it!" she exclaimed.

"More than beautiful."

Julia Podd rushed up to mar the harmony. Never does a fleeting moment of this kind set in but somebody does mar it. Julia flirted desperately with Mr. Angerstyne.

"Mr. Angerstyne, I have been looking for you everywhere. Mrs. Sanker wants to know if you will take us for a row on the water. The inn has a nice boat."

"Mrs. Sanker does!" he exclaimed. "With pleasure. Are you fond of the water, Miss Lewis?"

Anne made no particular reply. She stood

at a little distance now, apparently looking at the view; but I thought she wanted to hide her hot cheeks. Mr. Angerstyne caught her hand in his, playfully put his other hand within Miss Julia's arm, and so piloted them down. Ah, he might flirt back again with Julia Podd, and did; with Fanny also; but it was not to them his thoughts were given.

"Go on the water!" said Mrs. Sanker, who was sitting under the shade of the trees, repeating one of her favourite ballads to King in a see-saw tone. "*I!* Julia Podd must have misunderstood me. To go on the water might be nice for those who would like it, I said. I don't."

"Will you go?" asked Mr. Angerstyne, turning to Anne.

Anne shook her head, confessing herself too much of a coward. She had never been on any water in her life until when crossing over from France, and never wished to be. And Mr. Angerstyne ungallantly let the boat alone, though Julia and Fanny told him they adored the water.

We sat down in the shade by Mrs. Sanker; some on the bench by her side, some on the grass at her feet, and she recited for us the time-worn ballad she had begun for King: just as the following year she would recite things to us, as already told of, sitting on the floor beam of the turret-room. It was called "Lord Thomas." Should you like to hear it.

Lord Thomas, he was a bold forester,
And a keeper of the king's deer;
Fair Ellenor, she was a fair young lady,
Lord Thomas he loved her dear.

"Come, read me a riddle, dear mother," said he,
"And riddle us both as one:
Whether fair Ellen shall be mine—
Or to bring the brown girl home?"

"The brown girl she hath both houses and lands,
Fair Ellenor, she has none:
Therefore I'd advise thee, on my blessing,
To bring the brown girl home."

Then he decked himself and he dressed himself,
And his merry men, all in green:
And as he rode through the town with them
Folks took him to be some king.

When he came to fair Ellenor's bower
So boldly he did ring;
There was none so ready as fair Ellen herself
To loose Lord Thomas in.

"What news, what news, Lord Thomas,
What news have you brought unto me?"
"I'm come to invite you to my wedding;
And that is bad news for thee."

"Oh, now forbid," fair Ellenor said,
"That any such thing should be done:
For I thought to have been the bride myself,
And that you would have been the bridegroom.

"Come, read me a riddle, dear mother," said she,
"And riddle us both as one:
Whether I shall go to Lord Thomas's wedding,
Or whether I shall tarry at home?"

"There's one may be thy friend, I know;
But twenty will be thy foe:

Therefore I charge thee, on my blessing,
To Lord Thomas's wedding don't go."

"There's one will be my friend, I know,
Though twenty should be my foe:
Betide me life, or betide me death,
To Lord Thomas's wedding I go."

Then she went up into her chamber
And dressed herself all in green:
And when she came downstairs again,
They thought it must be some queen.

When she came to Lord Thomas's castle
So nobly she did ring:
There was none so ready as Lord Thomas himself
To loose this lady in.

Then he took her by her lily-white hand
And led her across the hall;
And he placed her on the daïs,
Above the ladies all.

"Is this your bride, Lord Thomas?
I think she looks wondrous brown:
You might have had as fair a young maiden
As ever trod English ground."

"Despise her not," said Lord Thomas;
"Despise her not unto me;
I love thy little finger, Ellen,
Better than her whole body."

The brown girl, having a knife in her hand,
Which was both keen and sharp,
Between the long ribs and the short,
She pierced fair Ellenor's heart.

"Oh, what's the matter?" Lord Thomas said,
"I think you look pale and wan:
You used to have as fine a colour
As ever the sun shone on."

"What, are you blind, now, Thomas?
Or can't you very well see?
Oh, can't you see, and oh, can't you see my own heart's blood
Run trickling down to my knee?"

Then Lord Thomas, he took the brown girl by the hand,
And led her across the hall;
And he took his own bride's head off her shoulders,
And dashed it against the wall.

Then Lord Thomas, he put the sword to the ground,
The point against his heart:
So there was an end of those three lovers,
So sadly they did part!

* * * * * * *

Upon fair Ellenor's grave grew a rose,
And upon Lord Thomas's a briar:
And there they twixed and there they twined, till they came to the steeple-top;
That all the world might plainly see, true love is never forgot.

"Oh, how delightful these old ballads are!" cried Anne, as Mrs. Sanker finished.

"Delightful!" retorted Julia Podd. "Why, they are full of queer phrases and outrageous metre and grammar!"

"My dears, it is, I suppose, how people wrote and spoke in those old days," said Mrs. Sanker, who had given great force to every turn of the song, and seemed to feel its disasters as much as though she had been fair Ellen herself.

"Just so," put in Mr. Angerstyne. "The world was not full of erudition then, as it is

now, and we accept the language—ay, and like it, too—as that of a past day. To me, these old ballads are wonderful: every one has a life's romance in it."

And that day at Holt Fleet, the only time I, Johnny Ludlow, ever saw the place, lives in my memory as a romance now.

As the days went on, there could be no mistake made by the one or two of us who kept our eyes open. I mean, as to Mr. Angerstyne's liking for Anne Lewis, and the reciprocal feelings he had awakened. With her, it had been a case of love at first sight; or nearly so. And that, if you may believe the learned in the matter, is the only love deserving the name. Perhaps it had been so with him: I don't know.

Three parts of their time they talked together in French, for Mr. Angerstyne spoke it well. And that vexed Julia and Fanny Podd; who called themselves good French scholars, but who somehow failed to understand. "They talk so fast; they do it on purpose," grumbled Fanny. At German Mr. Angerstyne was not apt. He spoke it a very little, and Anne would laughingly correct his mistakes, and repeat the German words slowly over, that he might catch the accent, causing us no end of fun. That was Anne's time of day, as Fanny Podd expressed it; but when it came to the musical evenings, Anne

was nowhere. The other two shone like the stars then, and did their best to monopolise Mr. Angerstyne.

That a fine gentleman, rich, and a man of the great world, should stay dawdling on at a boarding-house, puzzled Miss Dinah, who knew what was what. Of course it was no business of hers; she and Mrs. Lake were only too glad to have one who paid so liberally. He would run upstairs to sit with Captain Bristow; and twice a week he went to Malvern, sometimes not getting back in time for dinner.

The college school had begun again, and I was back at Lake's. For Tom and Alfred Lake, who had been away, were at home now; and nothing would do but I must come to their house before I went home—to which I was daily expecting a summons. As to the bride and bridegroom, we thought they meant to remain away for good; weeks had elapsed since their departure. Nobody regretted that: Julia and Fanny Podd considered Maythorn Bank the fag-end of the world, and hoped they might never be called to it. And Anne, living in the Elysian Fields, did not care to leave them for the dreary land outside their borders.

One evening we were invited to a tea-dinner at Captain Sanker's. The Miss Podds persisted in calling it a soirée. It turned out to be a scrambling kind of entertainment, and must have amused Mr. Angerstyne. Biddy had

poured the bowl of sweet custard over the meat patties by mistake, and put salt on the open tartlets instead of sugar. It seemed nothing but fun to us all. The evening, with its mistakes, and its laughter, and its genuine hospitality, came to an end, and we started to go home under the convoy of Mr. Angerstyne, all the Sanker boys, except Toby, attending us, It was a lovely moonlight night; Mrs. Lake. who had come in at the tail of the soirée to escort the girls home, remarked that the moon was never brighter.

"Why, just look there!" she exclaimed, as we turned up Edgar Street, intending to take that and the steps homewards; "the Tower gates are open!" For it was the custom to close the great gates of Edgar Tower at dusk.

"Oh, I know," cried Fred Sanker. "The sub-dean gives a dinner to-night; and the porter has left the gates wide for the carriages. Who is good for a race round the Green?"

It seemed that we all were, for the whole lot of us followed him in, leaving Mrs. Lake calling after us in consternation. The old Tower porter, thinking the Green was being charged by an army of ill-doers, rushed out of his den, shouting to us to come back.

Much we heeded him! Counting the carriages (three of them) waiting at the sub-dean's door, we raced onwards at will, some hither,

some yonder. King went back to Mrs. Lake. The evening's coolness felt delicious after the hot and garish day; the moonlight brought out the lights and shades of the queer old houses and the older cathedral. Collecting ourselves together presently, at Fred Sanker's whoop, Mr. Angerstyne and Anne were missing.

"They've gone to look at the Severn, I think," said Dan Sanker. "I heard him tell her it was worth looking at in the moonlight."

Yes, they were there. He had Anne's arm tucked up under his, and his head bent over her that she might catch his whispers. They turned round at hearing our footsteps.

"Indeed we must go home, Mr. Angerstyne," said Julia Podd, who had run down after me, and spoke crossly. "The college clock is chiming the quarter to eleven. There's Mrs. Lake waiting for us under the Tower!"

"Is it so late?" he answered her, in a pleasant voice. "Time flies quickly in the moonlight: I've often remarked it."

Walking forward, he kept by the side of Julia; Anne and I followed together. Some of the boys were shouting themselves hoarse from the top of the ascent, wanting to know if we were lost.

"Is it all settled, Anne?" I asked her, jestingly, dropping my voice.

"Is what settled?" she returned. But she

understood ; for her face looked like a rose in the moonlight.

"You know. *I* can see, if the others can't. And if it makes you happy, Anne, I am very glad of it."

"Oh Johnny, I hope—I hope no one else does see. But indeed you are making more of it than it deserves."

"What does he say to you ?"

"He has not *said* anything. So you see, Johnny, you may be quite mistaken."

It was all the same : if he had not said anything yet, there could be no question that he meant soon to say it. We were passing the old elm trees just then ; the moonlight, flickering through them on Anne's face, lighted up the sweet hope that lay on it.

"Sometimes I think if—if papa should not approve of it!" she whispered.

"But he is sure to approve of it. One cannot help liking Mr. Angerstyne : and his position is undeniable."

The sub-dean's dinner guests were gone, the three carriages bowling them away; and the porter kept up a fire of abuse as he waited to watch us through the little postern-door. The boys, being college boys, returned his attack with interest. Wishing the Sankers good-night, who ran straight down Edgar Street on their way home, we turned off up the steps, and found Mrs. Lake standing patiently at her door. I

saw Mr. Angerstyne catch Anne's hand for a moment in his, under cover of our entrance.

The morning brought news. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis were on their way to Maythorn Bank, expected to reach it that evening, and the young ladies were bidden to depart for it on the following day.

A wonderful change had taken place in Dr. Lewis. If they had doubted before whether the Doctor was not going into his dotage they could not doubt longer, for he was decidedly *in* it. A soft-speaking, mooning man, now; utterly lost in the shadow cast by his wife's importance. She appeared to be smiling in face and gentle in accent as ever, but she over-ruled every soul in the house: nobody but herself had a will in it. What little strength of mind he might have had, his new bride had taken out of him.

Anne did not like it. Hitherto mistress of all things under her father, she found herself passed over as a nonentity. She might not express an opinion, or hazard a wish. "My dear, *I* am here now," Mrs. Lewis said to her once or twice emphatically. Anne was deposed; her reign was over.

One little thing, that happened, she certainly did not like. Though humble-minded, entirely un-self-asserting, sweet tempered and modest as a girl should be, she did not like this. Mrs.

Lewis sent out invitations for dinner to some people in the neighbourhood, strangers to her until then ; the table was too full by one, and she had told Anne that she could not sit down. It was too bad ; especially as Julia and Fanny Podd filled two of the more important places, with bunches of fresh sweet-peas in their hair.

" Besides," Mrs. Lewis had said to Anne in the morning, " we must have a French side-dish or two, and there's nobody but you understands the making of them."

Whether the having to play the host was too much for him, or that he did not like the slight put upon his daughter, before the dinner was half over, the Doctor fell asleep. He could not be roused from it. Herbert Tanerton, who had sat by Mrs. Lewis's side to say grace, thought it was not sleep but unconsciousness. Between them, the company carried him into the other room ; and Anne, hastening to send in her French dishes, ran there to attend upon him.

" I hope and trust there's nothing amiss with his heart," said old Coney doubtfully, in the bride's ear.

" My dear Mr. Coney, his heart is as strong as mine—believe me," affirmed Mrs. Lewis, flicking some crumbs off the front of her wedding dress.

" I hope it is, I'm sure," repeated Coney. " I don't like that blue tinge round his lips."

They went back to the dinner-table when Dr.

Lewis revived. Anne remained kneeling at his feet, gently chafing his hands.

"What's the matter?" he cried, staring at her like a man bewildered. "What are you doing?"

"Dear papa, you fell asleep over your dinner, and they could not wake you. Do you feel ill?"

"Where am I?" he asked, as if he were speaking out of a dream. And she told him what she could. But she had not heard those suspicious words of old Coney's.

It was some minutes yet before he got much sense into him, or seemed fully to understand. He fell back in the chair then, with a deep sigh, keeping Anne's hand in his.

"Shall I get you anything, papa?" she asked. "You had eaten scarcely any dinner, they say. Would you like a little drop of brandy-and-water?"

"Why was not your dress ready?"

"My dress!" exclaimed Anne.

"She said so to me, when I asked why you did not come to table. Not made, or washed, or ironed; or something."

Anne felt rather at sea. "There's nothing the matter with my dresses, papa," she said. "But never mind them—or me. Will you go back to dinner? Or shall I get you anything here?"

"I don't want to go back; I don't want anything," he answered. "Go and finish yours, my dear."

"I have had mine," she said with a faint blush. For indeed her dinner had consisted of some bread-and-butter in the kitchen, eaten over the French stew-pans. Dr. Lewis was gazing out at the trees, and seemed to be in thought.

"Perhaps you stayed away from home rather too long, papa," she suggested. "You are not accustomed to travelling; and I think you are not strong enough for it. You looked very worn when you first came home; worn and ill."

"Ay," he answered. "I told her it did not do for me; but she laughed. It was nothing but a whirl, you know. And I only want to be quiet."

"It is very quiet here, dear papa, and you will soon feel stronger. You shall sit out of doors in the sun of a day, and I will read to you. I wish you would let me get you——"

"Hush, child. I'm thinking."

With his eyes still fixed on the out-of-door landscape, he sat stroking Anne's hand abstractedly. Nothing broke the silence, save the faint clatter of knives and forks from the dining-room.

"Mind, Anne, she made me do it," he suddenly exclaimed.

"Made you do what, papa?"

"And so, my dear, if I am not allowed to remedy it, and you feel disappointed, you must

think as lightly of it as you are able: and don't blame me more than you can help. I'll alter it again if I can, be sure of that; but I don't have a moment to myself, and at times it seems that she's just my keeper."

Anne answered soothingly that all he did must be right, but had no time to say more, for Mr. Coney, stealing in on tip-toe from the dining-room, came to see after the patient. Anne had not the remotest idea what it was that the Doctor alluded to; but she had caught up one idea with dread of heart—that the marriage had not increased his happiness. Perhaps had marred it.

Maythorn Bank did not suit Mrs. Lewis. Ere she had been two weeks at it, she found it insufferably dull; not to be endured at any price. There was no fashion thereabouts, and not much visiting; the neighbours were mostly simple, unpretending people, quite different from the style of company met with in garrison towns and pump-rooms. Moreover the few people who might have visited Mrs. Lewis, did not seem to take to her, or to remember that she was there. This did not imply discourtesy: Dr. Lewis and his daughter had just come into the place, strangers, so to say, and people could not practically recollect all at once that Maythorn Bank was inhabited. Where was the use of dressing up in peacock's plumes if nobody came to see her? The magnificent

wardrobe, laid in during her recent honey-moon, seemed as good as wasted.

"I can't stand this!" emphatically cried Mrs. Lewis one day to her daughters. And Anne, chancing to enter the room unexpectedly at the moment, heard her say it, and wondered what it meant.

That same afternoon, Dr. Lewis had another attack. Anne found him sitting beside the pear-tree insensible, his head hanging over the arm of the bench. Travelling had not brought this second attack on, that was certain; for no man could be leading a more quiet, moping life than he was. Save that he listened now and then to some book, read by Anne, he had no amusement whatever, no excitement; he might have sat all day long with his mouth closed, for all there was to open it for. Mrs. Lewis's powers of fascination, that she had exercised so persistently upon him as Mrs. Podd, seemed to have deserted her for good. She passed her hours gaping, sleeping, complaining, hardly replying to a question of his, if he by chance asked her one. Even the soft sweet voice that had charmed the world mostly degenerated now into a croak or a scream. Those very mild, not-say-bo-to-a-goose voices are sometimes only kept for public life.

"I shall take you off to Worcester," cried Mrs. Lewis to him, when he came out of his insensibility. "We will start as soon as breakfast's over in the morning."

Dr. Lewis began to tremble. "I don't want to go to Worcester," said he. "I want to stay here."

"But staying here is not good for you, my dear. You'll be better at Mrs. Lake's. It is the remains of this paint that is making you ill. I can smell it still quite strongly, and I decidedly object to stay in it."

"My dear, you can go; I shall not wish to prevent you. But, as to the paint, I don't smell it at all now. You can all go. Anne will take care of me."

"My dear Dr. Lewis, do you think I would leave you behind me? It *is* the paint. And you shall see a doctor at Worcester."

He said he was a doctor himself, and did not need another; he once more begged to be left at home in peace. All in vain: Mrs. Lewis announced her decision to the household; and Sally, whose wits had been well-nigh scared away by the doings and the bustle of the new inmates, was gladdened by the news that they were about to take their departure.

"Pourtant si le ciel nous protège.
Peut-être encore le reverrai-je."

These words, the refrain of an old French song, were being sung by Anne Lewis softly in the gladness of her heart, as she bent over the trunk she was packing. To be going back to Worcester, where *he* was, seemed to her like going to paradise.

"What are you doing *that* for?"

The emphatic question, spoken in evident surprise, came from her stepmother. The chamber-door was open; Mrs. Lewis had chanced to look in as she passed.

"What are you doing that for?" she stopped to ask. Anne ceased her song at once and rose from her knees. She really did not know what it was that had elicited the sharp query—unless it was the singing.

"You need not pack your own things. You are not going to Worcester. It is intended that you shall remain here and take care of the house and of Sally."

"Oh, but, Mrs. Lewis, I could not stay here alone," cried Anne, a hundred thoughts rushing tumultuously into her mind. "It could not be."

"Not stay here alone! Why, what is to hinder it? Do you suppose you would get run away with? Now, my dear, we will have no trouble, if you please. You will stay at home like a good girl—therefore you may unpack your box."

Anne went straight to her father, and found him with Herbert Tanerton. He had walked over from Timberdale to inquire after the Doctor's health.

"Could this be, papa?" she said. "That I am to be left alone here while you stay at Worcester?"

"Don't talk nonsense, child," was the peevish answer. "My belief is that you dream dreams, Anne, and then fancy them realities."

"But Mrs. Lewis tells me that I am not to go to Worcester—that I am to stay at home," persisted Anne. And she said it before Mrs. Lewis: who had come into the room then, and was shaking hands with the parson.

"I think, love, it will be so much better for dear Anne to remain here and see to things," she said, in that sweet company-voice of hers.

"No," dissented the Doctor, plucking up the courage to be firm. "If Anne stays here, I shall stay. I'm sure I'd be thankful if you'd let us stay: we should get a bit of peace and quiet."

She did not make a fuss before the parson. Perhaps she saw that to hold out might cause some unprofitable commotion. Treating Anne to a beaming smile, she remarked that her dear papa's wish was of course law, and bade her run and finish her packing.

And when they arrived the next day at Lake's, and Anne heard that Henry Angerstyne was in truth still there and knew that she should soon be in his presence, it did indeed seem to her that she had stepped into paradise. She was alone when he entered. The others had sought their respective chambers, leaving Anne to gather up their packages and follow, and she had her bonnet untied and her arms full of things when he came into the room. Paradise!

she might have experienced some bliss in her life, but none like unto this. Her veins were tingling, her heart-blood leaping. How well he looked! how noble! how superior to other men! As he caught her hand in his, and bent to whisper his low words of greeting, she could scarcely contain within bounds the ecstasy of her emotion.

"I am so glad you are back again, Anne! I could not believe the good news when the letter came to Mrs. Lake this morning. You have been away two weeks, and they have seemed like months."

"You did not come over: you said you should," faltered Anne.

"Ay. And I sprained my foot the day you left, and have had to nurse it. It is not strong yet. Bad luck, was it not? Bristow has been worse, too.—Where are you going?"

"I must take these things up to papa and Mrs. Lewis. Please let me go."

But, before he would release her hand, he suddenly bent his head and kissed her: once, twice.

"Pardon me, Anne, I could not help it; it is only a French greeting," he whispered, as she escaped with her face rosy-red, and her heart beating time to its own sweet music.

"What a stay Mr. Angerstyne is making!" exclaimed Fanny Podd, who had run about to seek Miss Dinah, and found her making a new surplice for Tom.

"Well, we are glad to have him stay," answered Miss Dinah, "and he has had a sprained ankle. We know now what is detaining him in Worcestershire. It seems that some old lady is lying ill at Malvern, and he can't get away."

"Some old lady lying ill at Malvern!" retorted Fanny, who liked to take Miss Dinah down when she could. "Why should that detain Mr. Angerstyne? Who is the old lady!"

"She is a relation of his: his great-aunt, I think. And I believe she is very fond of him, and won't let him go to any distance. All these visits he makes to Malvern are to see her. She is very rich, and he will come in for her money."

"I'm sure he's rich enough without it; he does not want more money," grumbled Fanny. "If the old lady would leave a little to those who need it, she might do some good."

"She'd have to be made of gold and diamonds if she left some to all who need it," sighed Miss Dinah. "Mr. Angerstyne deserves to be rich, he is so liberal with his money. Many a costly dainty he causes us to send up to that poor sick Captain Bristow, letting him think it is all in the regular boarding fare."

"But I think it was fearfully sly of him never to tell us why he went so much to Malvern—only you must always put in a good word for everybody, Miss Dinah. I asked him one day what his attraction was, that he should be per-

petually running over there, and he gravely answered me that he liked the Malvern air."

Just for a few days, Dr. Lewis seemed to get a little better. Mrs. Lewis's fascinations had returned to her, and she in a degree kept him alive. It might have been from goodness of heart, or it might have been that she did not like to neglect him before people just yet, but she was ever devising plans for his amusement —which of course included that of herself and of her daughters. Mr. Angerstyne had not been more lavish of money in coach hire than was Mrs. Lewis now. Carriages for the country and flies for the town—that was the order of the day. Anne was rarely invited to make one of the party: for her there seemed never room. What of that?—when by staying at home she had the society of Mr. Angerstyne.

While they were driving everywhere, or taking their pleasure in the town, shopping and exhibiting their finery, of which they seemed to display a new stock perpetually, Anne was left at liberty to enjoy her dangerous happiness. Dangerous, if it should not come to anything: and he had not spoken yet. They would sit together over their German, Anne trying to beat it into him, and laughing with him at his mistakes. If she went out to walk, she presently found herself overtaken by Mr. Angerstyne: and they would linger in the mellow light of the soft autumn days, or in the early twilight.

Whatever might come of it, there could be no question that for the time being she was living in the most intense happiness. And about a fortnight of this went on without interruption.

Then Dr. Lewis began to droop. One day when he was out he had another of those attacks in the carriage. It was very slight, Mrs. Lewis said when they got back; he did not lose consciousness for more than three or four minutes. But he continued to be so weak and ill afterwards that a physician was called in—Dr. Malden. What he said was known only to the patient and his wife, for nobody else was admitted to the conference.

"I want to go home," the Doctor said to Anne the next morning, speaking in his usual querulous, faint tone, and as if his mind were half gone. "I'm sure I did not smell any paint the last time; it must have been her fancy. I want to go there to be quiet."

"Well, papa, why don't you say so?"

"But it's of no use my saying so: she won't listen. I can't stand the racket here, child, and the perpetual driving out: the wheels of the carriages shake my head. And look at the expense! It frightens me."

Anne scarcely knew what to answer. She herself was powerless; and, so far as she believed, her father was; utterly so. Powerless in the hands of his new wife. Dr. Lewis glanced round the room as if to make sure there

were no eavesdroppers, and went on in a whisper.

"I'm terrified, Anne. I am being ruined. All my ready money's gone; she has had it all; she made me draw it out of the bank. And there, in that drawer, are two rolls of bills; she brought them to me yesterday, and there's nothing to pay them with."

Anne's heart fluttered. Was he only fancying these things in his decaying mind? Or, were they true?

"September has now come in, papa, and your quarter's dividends will soon be due, you know. Do not worry yourself."

"They have been forestalled," he whispered. "She owed a lot of things before her marriage, and the people would have sued me had I not paid them. I wish we were back in France, child! I wish we had never left it!" And, but for one thing, Anne would have wished it, too.

One afternoon, when it was getting late, Anne went into High Street to buy some ribbon for her hair. Mrs. Lewis and her party had gone over to Croome, somebody having given her an order to see the gardens there. Lake's house was as busy as it could be, some fresh inmates of consequence being expected that evening; Anne had been helping Miss Dinah, and it was only at the last minute she could run

out. In coming back, the ribbon bought, just abreast of the college gates she heard steps behind her, and found her arm touched. It was by Mr. Angerstyne. For the past two days—nearly three—he had been absent at Malvern. The sight of him was to her as if the sun had shone.

"Oh!—is it you?—are you back?" she cried, with as much quiet indifference as she could put on.

"I have just got back. My aunt is better. And how are you, Anne?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Need you go in yet? Let us take a short stroll. The afternoon is delightful."

He called it afternoon, but it was getting on fast for evening: and he turned in at the college gates as he spoke. So they wound round St. Michael's churchyard and passed on to the Dark Alley, and so down the long flight of steps that leads from it, and on to the banks of the Severn.

"How are you all going on at Lake's?" he asked presently, breaking the silence.

"Just as usual. To-day is a grand field day," Anne added gaily: "at least, this evening is to be one, and we are not to dine till seven o'clock."

"Seven? So much the better. But why?"

"Some people of importance are coming——"

Mr. Angerstyne's laugh interrupted her. She laughed also.

"It is what Miss Dinah said: 'people of importance.' They will arrive late, so the dinner-hour is put off."

"Take care, Anne!"

A horse, towing a barge, was overtaking them. Mr. Angerstyne drew Anne out of the way, and the dinner and the new guests were forgotten.

It was almost dusk when they returned. The figures on the college tower were darkened, as they came through the large boat-house gateway: the old elm-trees yonder, filled with their cawing rooks, looked weird in the dim twilight. Mr. Angerstyne did not turn to the Dark Alley again, but went straight up to the Green. He was talking of his estate in Essex. It was a topic often chosen by him; and Anne seemed to know the place quite well by this time.

"You would like the little stream that runs through the grounds," he was observing. "It is not, of course, like the grand river we have just left, but it is pleasant to wander by, for it winds in and out in the most picturesque manner possible, and the banks are overshadowed by trees. Yes, Anne, you would like that."

"Are you going through the cloisters?—is it not too late?" she interrupted, quite at a loss for something to say; not caring to answer that she *should* like to wander by the stream.

For he was crossing towards the little south

cloister door: though onwards through the Green would have been their more direct road.

"Too late? No. Why should it be? You are not afraid of ghosts, are you?"

Anne laughed. But, lest she should be afraid of ghosts, he put her hand within his arm as they passed through the dark narrow passage beyond the postern; aud so they marched arm-in-arm through the cloisters.

"To sit by that winding stream on a summer's day listening to its murmurs, to the singing of the birds, the sweet sighing of the trees; or holding low converse with a cherished companion—yes, Anne, you would like that. It would just suit you, for you are of a silent and dreamy nature."

There might not be much actual meaning in the words if you sat down to analyze them: but, to the inexperienced mind of Anne, they sounded very like plain speaking. At any rate, she took them to be an earnest that she *should* sometime sit by that stream with him—his wife. The dusky cloisters seemed to have suddenly filled themselves with refulgent light; the gravestones over which she was passing felt soft as the mossy glades of fairy-land: ay, even that mysterious stone that bears on it the one terrible word "Miserrimus." Heaven was above her, and heaven beneath: there was no longer any prosaic earth for Anne Lewis.

"Good-night to you, gentlefolks."

The salutation was from the cloister porter;

who, coming in to close the gates, met them as they were nearing the west door. Not another word had passed until now: Mr. Angerstyne had fallen into silence; Anne could not have spoken to gain the world.

"Good-night to you, my man," he answered.

Lake's was in a bustle when they reached it. The luggage of the new people, who had just been shown to their chambers, was being taken in; the carriage containing Dr. and Mrs. Lewis was then just driving up. Anne felt alarmed as she caught sight of her father, he looked so very ill. Mr. Angerstyne, in his ready, kindly way, waited to help him down and give him his arm along the passage; he then ran up to his room, remarking that he had letters to write.

The people assembled for dinner in full fig, out of deference to the new comers: who proved to be a Lady Knight, and a Mrs. and Miss Colter. Anne wore her pretty grey bridesmaid's dress, and the ribbon, just bought, in her hair. At the very last moment, Mr. Angerstyne came down, his hands full of the letters he had been writing.

"Why, are *you* here?" exclaimed to him Lady Knight: who seemed to be a chatty, voluble woman. "I *am* surprised."

Mr. Angerstyne, putting his letters on the side table, until he could take them to the post, turned round at the address. A moment's stare,

half doubt, half astonishment, and he went forward to shake Lady Knight's hand.

"What brings you here?" she asked.

"I have been here some little time. Old Miss Gibson is at Malvern, so I can't go far away."

There was no opportunity for more: dinner was waiting. Mr. Angerstyne and Anne sat side by side that evening; Lady Knight was opposite. Miss Diana presided as usual, her best yellow cap perched on the top of her curls.

During an interval of silence between the general bustle and clatter of the dinner, for the two girls who waited (after their own fashion), had both run away with the fish to bring in the meat, Lady Knight looked across the table to put a question to Mr. Angerstyne.

"How is your wife?"

The silence dropped to a dead stillness. He appeared not to hear.

"How is your wife, Henry Angerstyne? Have you seen her lately?"

He could not make believe to be deaf any longer, and answered with angry curtness.

"No, I have not. She is all right, I suppose."

By the way the whole table stared, you might have thought a bomb-shell had fallen. Miss Diana sat with her mouth open in sheer amazement, and then spoke involuntarily.

"Are you really married, Mr. Angerstyne?"

"Of course he is married," said Lady Knight,

answering Miss Diana. "All the world knows that. His wife is my cousin. I saw her at Lowestoft a few weeks ago, Henry. She was looking prettier than ever."

"Ah, Mr. Angerstyne, how sly you were, not to tell us!" cried Mrs. Lewis, playfully shaking her fan at him. "You—— Oh, goodness me!"

A loud crash! Jenny the maid had dropped a hot vegetable dish on the floor, scattering the pieces and spilling the peas; and followed it up with a shriek and a scream. That took off the attention; and Mr. Angerstyne, coolly eating away at his bread, turned to make some passing remark to Anne.

But the words he would have said were left unspoken. No ghost ever seen, in cloisters or out of them, was whiter than she. Lips and fingers were alike trembling.

"You should be more careful, Jenny!" he called out in a tone of authority. "Ladies don't care to be startled in this way." Just as though Anne had turned white from the clatter of the broken dish!

Well, it had been a dreadful revelation for her. All the sunshine of this world seemed to have gone out for ever; to have left nothing behind it but a misty darkness. Rallying her pride and her courage, she went on eating her dinner, as the others did. Her head was throbbing, her brain burning; her mind had turned to chaos.

She heard them making arrangements to go on a picnic party to the woods at Croome on the morrow; not in the least understanding what was said, or planned.

"You did surprise us!" observed Mrs. Lewis to Lady Knight, when they were in the drawing-room after dinner, and Mr. Angerstyne had gone out to post his letters. "What could have been his motive for allowing us to think him a bachelor?"

"A dislike to mention her name," replied Lady Knight, candidly. "That was it, I expect. He married her for her pretty face, and then found out what a goose she was. So they did not get on together. She goes her way, and he goes his; now and then they meet for a week or two, but it is not often."

"What a very unsatisfactory state of things!" cried Miss Dinah, handing round the cups of coffee herself for fear of another upset. "Is it her fault, or his?"

"Faults lie on both sides," said Lady Knight, who had an abrupt way of speaking, and was as poor as a church mouse. "She has a fearfully affronting temper of her own; those women with dolls' faces sometimes have; and he was not as forbearing as he might have been. Any way, that is the state of affairs between Mr. and Mrs. Angerstyne; and, apart from it, there's no scandal or reproach attaching to either of them."

Anne, sitting in a quiet corner, listened to all this mechanically. What mattered the details to her ?—the broad fact had been enough. The hum of conversation was going on all around; her father, looking somewhat the better for his dinner, was playing at backgammon with Tom Lake. She saw nothing, knew nothing, until Mr. Angerstyne dropped into the seat beside her.

"Shall you join this expedition to Croome, to-morrow, Anne ?"

Julia and Fanny were thumping over a duet, pedal down, and Anne barely caught the low-spoken words.

"I do not know," she answered, after a brief pause. "My head aches."

"I don't much care about it myself; rather the opposite. I shall certainly not go if you don't."

Why! he was speaking to her just as though nothing had occurred! If anything could have added to her sense of shame and misery, it was this. It sounded like an insult, arousing all the spirit she possessed; her whole nature rose in rebellion against his line of conduct.

"Why have you been talking to me these many weeks, as you have been talking, Mr. Angerstyne ?" she asked in her straightforward simplicity, turning her face to his.

"There has been no harm in it," he answered.

"*Harm !*" she repeated, from her wrung

heart. "Perhaps not to you. There has been at least no good in it."

"If you only knew what an interval of pleasantness it has been for me, Anne! Almost deluding me into forgetting my odious chains and fetters."

"Would a *gentleman* have so amused himself, Mr. Angerstyne?"

But she gave him no opportunity of reply. Rising from her seat, and drawing her slight form to its full height, she looked into his face steadily, knowing not perhaps how much of scorn and reproach her gaze betrayed, then crossed the room and sat down by her father. Once after that she caught his eye: caught the expression of sorrow, of repentance, of deep commiseration that shone in every line of his face—for she could not altogether hide the pain seated in her own. And later, amid the bustle of the general good-nights, she found her hand pressed within his, and heard his whispered, contrite prayer——

"Forgive me, Anne; forgive me!"

She lay awake all night, resolving to be brave, to make no sign; praying heaven to help her bear the anguish of her sorely-stricken heart, not to let the blow quite kill her. It seemed to her that she must feel it henceforth during all her life.

And before the house was well up in the morning, a messenger arrived post haste from

Malvern, to summon Mr. Angerstyne to his aunt's dying bed. He told Miss Dinah, when he shook hands with her at parting, that she might as well send his traps after him, if she would be so kind, as he thought he might not be able to return to Worcester again.

And that was the ending of Anne Lewis's love. Not a very uncommon end, people say. But she had been hardly dealt by.

PART THE THIRD.

The blinds of a house closely drawn, the snow drifting against the windows outside, and somebody lying dead upstairs, cannot be called a lively state of things. Mrs. Lewis and her daughters, Julia and Fanny Podd, sitting over the fire in the darkened dining-room at Maythorn Bank, were finding it just the contrary.

When Dr. Lewis, growing worse and worse during their sojourn at Lake's boarding-house at Worcester the previous autumn, had one day plucked-up courage to open his mind to his physician, telling him that he was pining for the quiet of his own little cottage home, and that the stir and racket at Lake's was more than he could bear, Dr. Malden peremptorily told Mrs. Lewis that he must have his wish,

and go. So she had to give in, and prepared to take him; though it went frightfully against the grain. That was in September, three months back; he had been getting weaker and more imbecile ever since, and now, just as Christmas was turned, he had sunk quietly away to his rest.

Anne, his loving, gentle daughter, had been his constant companion and attendant. He had not been so ill as to lie in bed, but a great deal had to be done for him, especially in the matter of amusing what poor remnant of mind was left. She read to him, she talked to him, she wrapped greatcoats about him, and took him out to walk on sunshiny days in the open walk by the laurels. It was well for Anne that she was thus incessantly occupied, for it diverted her mind from the misery left there by the unwarrantable conduct of Mr. Angerstyne. When a girl's lover proves faithless, to dwell upon him and lament him brings to her a kind of painful pleasure; but that negative indulgence was denied to Anne Lewis: Henry Angerstyne was the husband of another, and she might not, willingly, keep him in her thoughts. To forget him, as she strove to do, was a hard and bitter task: but the indignation she felt at the man's deceit and cruel conduct was materially helping her. Once, since, she had seen his name in the *Times*: it was amidst the list of visitors staying at some nobleman's country house: Henry

Angerstyne. And the thrill that passed through her veins as the name caught her eye, the sudden stopping and then rushing violently onwards of her life's blood, convinced her how little she had forgotten him.

"But I shall forget him in time," she said to herself, pressing her hand upon her wildly-beating heart. "In time, God helping me."

And from that moment she redoubled her care and thought for her father; and he died blessing her and her love for him.

Anne felt the loss keenly; though perhaps not quite so much so as she would have felt it had her later life been less full of suffering. It seemed to be but the last drop added to her cup of bitterness. She knew that to himself death was a release: he had ceased to find pleasure in life. And now she was left amidst strangers, or worse than strangers; she seemed not to have a friend to turn to in the wide world.

Dr. Lewis had died on Monday morning. This was Tuesday. Mrs. Lewis had been seeing people to-day and yesterday, giving her orders; but never once consulting Anne, or paying her the compliment to say, Would you like it to be this way, or that?

"How on earth any human being could have pitched upon this wretched out-of-the-world place, Crabb, to settle down in, puzzles me com-

pletely," suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Lewis, bending forward to stir the fire.

"He must have been a lunatic," acquiesced Julia, irreverently alluding to the poor man who was lying in the room above.

"Not a decent shop in the place! Not a dressmaker who can cut out a properly-fitting skirt! Be quiet, Fanny: you need not *dance*."

"One does not know what to do," grumbled Fanny, ceasing to shuffle, and returning to her seat. "But I should like to know, mamma, about our mourning."

"I think I shall go to Worcester to-day and order it," spoke up Mrs. Lewis briskly, after a pause of doubt. "Necessity has no law; and we cannot get proper things unless I do. Yes, we will go: I don't mind the weather. Julia, ring the bell."

Anne—poor Anne—came in to answer the bell. She had no choice: Sally was out on an errand.

"Just see that we have a tray in with the cold meat, Anne, at half-past twelve. We must go to Worcester about the mourning——"

"To Worcester!" involuntarily interrupted Anne, in her surprise.

"There's no help for it, though of course it's not the thing I would choose to do," said Mrs. Lewis, coldly. "One cannot provide proper things here: bonnets especially. I will get you a bonnet at the same time. And we must

have a bit of something, hot and nice, for tea, when we come home."

"Very well," sighed Anne.

In the afternoon, Anne sat in the same room alone, busy over some black work, on which her tears dropped slowly. When it was growing dusk, Mr. Coney and the young Rector of Timberdale came in together. Herbert Tanerton did not forget that his late stepfather and Dr. Lewis were half brothers. Anne brushed away the signs of her tears, laid down her work, and stirred the fire into a blaze.

"Now, my lass," said the farmer, in his plain, homely way, but he always meant kindly, "I've just heard that that step-mother of yours went off to Worcester to-day with those two dandified girls of hers, and so I thought I'd drop in while the coast was clear. I confess I don't like her: and I say that somebody ought to look a bit to you and your interests."

"And I, coming over upon much the same errand, met Mr. Coney at the gate," added Herbert Tanerton, with a smile as near geniality as he ever gave. "I wish to express my deep regret for your loss, Miss Lewis, and to assure you of my true sympathy. You will think my visit a late one, but I had a—a service this afternoon." He would not say a funeral.

"You are both very kind, very," said Anne, her eyes again filling, "and I thank you for thinking of me. I feel isolated from all: this

place at best is but strange to me after my life's home in France. It seems that I have not a friend in the world."

„ Yes, you have," said the farmer; "and if my wife had not been staying with our sick daughter at Worcester, she'd have been in to tell you the same. My dear, you are just going, please, to make a friend of *me*. And you won't think two or three questions, that I'd like to put, impertinent, will you?"

"That I certainly will not," said Anne.

"Well, now, to begin with: Did your father make a will?"

"Oh yes. I hold it."

"And do you chance to know how the property is left?"

"To me. No name but my own is mentioned in it."

"Then you'll be all right," said Mr. Coney. "I feared he might have been leaving somebody else some. You will have about £250 a-year: and that's enough for a young girl. When your father first came over, he spoke to me of his income and his means."

"I—I fear the income will be somewhat diminished from what it was," hesitated Anne, turning red at having to confess so much, because it would tell against her stepmother. "My father has had to sell out a good deal lately; to entrench upon his capital. I think the trouble it gave him hastened his end."

"Sell out for what?" asked old Coney.

"For bills, and—and debts, that came upon him."

"Her bills? Her debts?"

Anne did not expressly answer, but old Coney caught up the truth, and nodded his head in wrath. He as good as knew it before.

"Well, child, I suppose you may reckon, at the worst, on a clear two hundred a-year, and you can live on that. Not keep house, perhaps; and it would be very lonely for you also. You will have to take up your abode with some pleasant family: many a one would be glad to have you."

"I should like to go back to France," sighed Anne, recalling the bitter misery that England had brought her: first in her new stepmother, then in Mr. Angerstyne, and now in her father's death. "I have many dear friends in France who will take every care of me."

"Well, I don't know," cried old Coney, with a blank look. "France may be very well for some people; but I'd a'most as lieve go to the gallows as there. Don't you like England?'

"I should like it well, if I—if I could be happy in it," she answered, turning red again at the thought of him who had marred her happiness. "But, you see, I have no ties here."

"You must make ties, my lass."

"How much of the income ought I to pay

over yearly to Mrs. Lewis, do you think?" she questioned. "Half of it?"

"*Half!* No!" burst forth old Coney, coughing down a strong word which had nearly slipped out. "You will give her none. *None.* A pretty idea of justice you must have, Anne Lewis."

"But it would be fair to give it her," argued Anne. "My father married her."

"Oh, did he, though! She married him. *I* know. Other folks know. You will give her none, my dear, and allow her none. She is a hard, scheming, deceitful brick-bat of a woman. What made her lay hold of your poor weakened father, and play off upon him her wiles and her guiles, and marry him, right or wrong?" ran on old Coney, getting purple enough for apoplexy. "She did it for a home; she did it that she might get her back debts paid; that's what. She has had her swing as long as his poor life lasted, and put you down as if you were a changeling; we have all seen *that.* Now that her short day's over, she must go back again to her own ways and means. Ask the parson there what he thinks."

The parson, in his cold sententious way, that was so much more suited to an old bishop than a young rector, avowed that he thought with Mr. Coney. He could not see that Mrs. Lewis's few months of marriage entitled her (all attendant circumstances being taken into

consideration) to deprive Miss Lewis of any portion of her patrimony.

"You are sure you have got the will all tight and safe?" resumed Mr. Coney. "I wouldn't answer for her not stealing it. Ah, you may laugh, young lassie, but I don't like that woman. Miss Dinah Lake was talking to me a bit the other day; she don't like her, either."

Anne was smiling at his vehement partisanship. She rose, unlocked a desk that stood on the side-table, and brought out a parchment, folded and sealed. It was subscribed "Will of Thomas Lewis, M.D."

"Here it is," she said. "Papa had it drawn up by an English lawyer just before we left France. He gave it to me, as he was apt to mislay things himself, charging me to keep it safely."

"And mind you do keep it safely," enjoined old Coney. "It won't be opened, I suppose, till after the funeral's over."

"But wait a minute," interposed the clergyman. "Does not marriage—a subsequent marriage—render a will invalid?"

"Bless my heart, no: much justice there'd be in that!" retorted old Coney, who knew about as much of law as he did of the moon. And Mr. Tanerton said no more; he was not certain; and supposed the older and more experienced man might be right.

Anne sighed as she locked up the will again.

She was both just and generous; and she knew she should be sure to hand over to Mrs. Lewis the half of whatever income it might give her.

"Well, my girl," said the farmer, as they prepared to leave, "if you want me, or anything I can do, you just send Sally over, and I'll be here in a jiffy."

"It is to be at Timberdale, I conclude?" whispered Herbert Tanerton, as he shook hands. Anne knew that he alluded to the funeral; and the colour came up in her face as she answered.

"I don't know. My father wished it; he said he wished to lie by his brother. But Mrs. Lewis—here they come, I think."

They came in with snowy bonnets and red noses, stamping the slush off their shoes. It was a good walk from the station. Mrs. Lewis had expected to get a fly there; one was generally in waiting: but somebody jumped out of the train before she did, and secured it. It made her feel cross and look cross.

"Such a wretched trapes!" she was beginning in a vinegar tone; but at sight of the gentlemen her face and voice smoothed down to oil. She begged them to resume their seats; but they said they were already going.

"We were just asking about the funeral," the farmer stayed to say. "It is to be at Timberdale?"

Up went Mrs. Lewis's handkerchief to her

eyes. "Dear Mr. Coney, I think not. Crabb will be better."

"But he wished to lie at Timberdale."

"Crabb will be so much cheaper—and less trouble," returned the widow, with a sob. "It is as well to avoid useless expense."

"Cheaper!" cried old Coney, his face purple again with passion, so much did he dislike her and her ways. "Not cheaper at all. *Dearer.* Dearer, ma'am. Must have a hearse and coach, any way: and Herbert Tanerton here won't charge fees if it's done at Timberdale."

"Oh, just as you please, my dear sir. And if *he* wished it, poor dear! Yes, yes; Timberdale of course. Anywhere."

They got out before she had dried her eyes —or pretended at it. Julia and Fanny then fetched in some bandboxes, which had been waiting in the passage. Mrs. Lewis forgot her tears, and put back her cloak.

"Which is Anne's?" she asked. "Oh, this one"—beginning to undo one of the boxes. "My own will be sent to-morrow night. I bought yours quite plain, Anne."

Very plain indeed was the bonnet she handed out. Plain and common, and made of the cheapest materials; one that a lady would not like to put upon her head. Julia and Fanny were trying theirs on at the chimney-glass. Gay bonnets, theirs, glistening with jet beads and black flowers. The bill lay open on the

table, and Anne read the cost: her own, twelve shillings; the other two, thirty-three shillings each. Mrs. Lewis made a grab at the bill, and crushed it into her pocket.

"I knew you would prefer it plain," said she. "For real mourning it is always a mistake to have things too costly."

"True," acquiesced Anne; "but yet—I think they should be *good*."

It seemed to her that to wear this bonnet would be very like disrespect to the dead. She silently determined to buy a better as soon as she had the opportunity.

Of all days, for weather, the one of the funeral was about the worst. Sleet, snow, rain, and wind. The Squire had a touch of lumbago; he could not face it; and old Coney came bustling in to say that I was to attend in his place. Anne wanted Johnny Ludlow to go all along, he added; her father had liked him; only there was no room before in the coach.

"Yes, yes," cried the Squire, "Johnny of course. He is not afraid of lumbago. Make haste and get into your black things, lad."

Well, it was shivery, as we rolled along in the creachy old mourning-coach, behind the hearse: Mr. Coney and the Podds' cousin-lawyer from Birmingham on one side; I and Cole, the doctor, opposite. The sleet pattered against the windows, the wind whistled in our

ears. The lawyer kept saying "eugh," and shaking his shoulders, telling us he had a cold in his head; and looked just as stern as he had at the wedding.

All was soon over: Herbert Tanerton did not read slowly to-day: and we got back to Maythorn Bank. Cole had left us: he stopped the coach en route, and cut across a field to see a patient: but Mr. Coney drew me into the house with him after the lawyer.

"We will go in, Johnny," he whispered. "The poor girl has no relation or friend to back her up, and I shall stay with her while the will's read."

Mrs. Lewis, in a new widow's cap as big as a house, and the two girls in shining jet chains, were sitting in state. Anne came in the next minute, her face pale, her eyes red. We all sat down; and for a short while looked at one another in silence, like so many mutes.

"Any will to be read? I am told there is one," spoke the lawyer—who had, as Fanny Podd whispered to me, a wife at home as sour as himself. "If so, it had better be produced: I have to catch a train."

"Yes, there is a will," answered old Coney, glad to find that Anne, as he assumed, had mentioned the fact. "Miss Lewis holds the will. Will you get it, my dear?"

Anne unlocked the desk on the side-table, and put the will into Mr. Coney's hand. With-

out saying with your leave, or by your leave, he broke the seals, and clapped on his spectacles.

"What's *that?*" Mrs. Lewis asked old Coney, from her seat on the sofa.

"Dr. Lewis's will, ma'am. Made in France, I believe: was it not, Miss Anne?"

"My dear, sweet creature, it is so much waste paper," spoke Mrs. Lewis, smiling sweetly upon Anne. "My deeply-lamented husband's last will and testament was made long since he left France."

Pulling up the sofa pillow at her elbow, she produced another will, and asked the lawyer if he would be good enough to unseal and read it. It had been made, as the date proved, at Cheltenham, the day after she and Dr. Lewis were married; and it left every earthly thing he possessed to "his dear wife, Louisa Jane Lewis."

Old Coney's face was a picture. He stared alternately at the will in his hands, at the one just read by the lawyer. Anne stood meekly by his side; looking as if she did not understand matters.

"*That* can't stand good!" spoke the farmer in his honest indignation. "The money can't go to you, ma'am"—turning his burly form about to face Mrs. Lewis, and treading on my toes as he did it. "The money is this young lady's: part of it comes from her own mother: it can't

be yours. Thomas Lewis must have signed the will in his sleep."

"Does a daughter inherit before a wife, dear sir?" cried Mrs. Lewis, in a voice soft as butter. "It is the most just will my revered husband could have made. I *need* the money: I cannot keep on the house without it. Anne does not need it: she has no house to keep."

"Look here," says old Coney, buttoning his coat and looking fiercely at the company. "It's not my wish to be rude to-day, remembering what place we came straight here from; but if you don't want to be put down as—as schemers, you will not lose an hour in making over the half of that income to Anne Lewis. It is what she proposed to do by *you*, madam, when she thought all was left to her," he added, brushing past Mrs. Lewis. "Come along, Johnny."

The time went on. Mrs. Lewis kept all the money. She gave notice to leave the house at midsummer: but she had it on her hands until then, and told people she should die of its dulness. So far as could be known, she had little, if any, income, save that which she inherited from Dr. Lewis.

Anne's days did not pass in clover. Treated as of no account, she was made fully to understand that she was only tolerated in what was once her own home; and she had to make

herself useful in it from morning till night, just like a servant. Remembering what had been, and what was, Anne felt heart-broken, submitting patiently and unresistingly to trials; but a reaction set in, and her spirit grew rebellious.

"Is there any remedy, I wonder?" she asked herself one night in her little chamber, when preparing for bed, and the day had been a particularly trying day. She had ventured to ask for a few shillings for some purpose or other, and was told she could not have them: being Easter Monday, Sally had had a holiday, and she had been kept at work like a slave in the girl's place: Herbert Tanerton and his wife had come to invite her for a day or two to Timberdale, and a denial was returned to them without herself being consulted, or even allowed to see them. Yes, it had been a trying day. And in France Easter had always been kept as a *fête*.

"Is there not a remedy?" she debated, as she slowly undressed. "I have no home but this; but—could I not find one?"

She knew that she had no means of living, save by her own exertions; she had not even a rag to wear or a coin to spend, save what should come to her by Mrs. Lewis's bounty. And, whether that lady possessed bounty or not, she seemed never to possess ready money. It appeared to Anne that she had been hardly dealt by in more ways than one; that the world was full of nothing but injustice and trouble.

"And I fancy," added Anne, thinking out her thoughts, "that they will be glad to get rid of me; that they want me gone. So I dare say there will be no objection made here."

With morning light, she was up and busy. It fell to her lot to prepare the breakfast: and she must not keep the ladies waiting for it one minute. This morning, however, she had to keep them waiting; but not through any fault of hers.

They grew impatient. Five minutes past nine: ten minutes past nine: what did Anne mean? Julia and Fanny were not much better dressed than when they got out of bed; old jackets on, rough and rumpled hair stuck up with hair-pins. In that respect they presented a marked contrast to Anne, who was ever trim and nice.

"I'm sure she must be growing the coffee-berries!" cried Fanny, as she flung the door open. "*Is* that breakfast coming to-day, or to-morrow?"

"In two minutes," called back Anne.

"Oh, what a dreary life it is, out here!" groaned Mrs. Lewis. "Girls, I think we will go over to Worcester to-day, and arrange to stay a week at Lake's. And then you can go to the subscription ball at the Town Hall, that you are so wild over."

"Oh, do, do!" cried Julia, all animation now. "If I don't go to that ball, I shall die."

"I shall run away if we don't; I have said all along I would not miss the Easter ball," spoke Fanny. "Mamma, I cannot *think* why you don't shut this miserable house up!"

"Will you find the rent for another?" coolly asked Mrs. Lewis. "What *can* that girl be at with the coffee?"

It came in at last; and Anne was railed at for her laziness. When she could get a word in, she explained that Sally had had an accident with the tea-kettle, and fresh water had to be boiled.

More indignation: Julia's egg turned out to be bad. What business had Anne to boil bad eggs? Anne, saying nothing, took it away, boiled another and brought it in. Then Mrs. Lewis fancied she could eat a thin bit of toasted bacon; and Anne must go and do it at the end of a fork. Altogether the breakfast was nearly at an end before she could sit down at a corner of the table and eat her own bread and butter.

"I have been thinking," she began, in a hesitating tone, to Mrs. Lewis, "that I should like to go out. If you have no objection."

"Go out where?"

"Into some situation."

Mrs. Lewis, in the act of conveying a piece of bacon to her mouth, held it suspended in mid air, and stared at Anne in amazement.

"Into *what?*"

"A situation in some gentleman's family. I

have no prospect before me; no home; I must earn my own living."

"The girl's daft!" cried Mrs. Lewis, resuming her breakfast. "No home! Why, you have a home here; your proper home. Was it not your father's?"

"Yes. But it is not mine."

"It is yours; and your days in it are spent usefully. What more can you want? Now, Anne, hold your tongue, and don't talk nonsense. If you have finished your breakfast you can begin to take the things away."

"Mamma, why don't you let her go?" whispered Fanny, as Anne went out with the first lot of plates.

"Because she is useful to me," said Mrs. Lewis. "Who else is there to see to our comforts? we should be badly off with that incapable Sally. And who would do all the needlework? recollect how much she gets through. No; as long as we are here, Anne must stay with us. Besides, the neighbourhood would have its say finely if we let her turn out. People talk, as it is, about the will, and are not so friendly as they might be. As if they would like me to fly in the face of my dear departed husband's wishes, and tacitly reproach his judgment!"

But Anne did not give up. When she had taken all the things away and folded up the table-cloth, she came in again and spoke.

"I hope you will not oppose me in this, Mrs. Lewis. I should like to take a situation."

"And, pray, what situation do you suppose you could take?" ironically spoke Mrs. Lewis. "You are not fitted to fill one in a gentleman's family."

"Unless it be as cook-maid," put in Julia.

"Or seamstress," said Fanny. "By the way, I want some more cuffs made, Anne."

"I should like to try for a situation, notwithstanding my deficiencies. I could do something or other."

"There, that's enough: must I tell you again not to talk nonsense?" retorted Mrs. Lewis. "And now you must come upstairs and see to my things, and to Julia's and Fanny's. We are going to Worcester by the half-past eleven train—and you may expect us home to tea when you see us."

They went off. As soon as their backs were turned, Anne came running into our house, finding me and Mrs. Todhetley at the piano. It was pleasant Easter weather, though March was not out: the Squire and Todd had gone to Dyke Manor on some business, and would not be home till late. Anne told all her doubts and difficulties to the Mater, and asked her advice, as to whether there would be anything wrong in her seeking for a situation.

"No, my dear," said the mother, "it would be right, instead of wrong. If——"

"If people treated me as they treat you, Anne, I'd not stay with them a day," said I, hotly. "I don't like toads."

"Oh, Johnny!" cried Mrs. Todhetley. "Never call names, dear. No obligation whatever, Anne, lies on you to remain in that home; and I think you would do well to leave it. You shall stay and dine with me and Johnny at one o'clock, Anne; and we will talk it over."

"I wish I could stay," said poor Anne; "I hardly knew how to spare these few minutes to run here. Mrs. Lewis has left me a gown to unpick and turn, and I must hasten to begin it."

"So would I begin it!" I cried, going out with her as far as the gate. "And I should like to know who is a toad if she's not."

"Don't you think I might be a nursery governess, Johnny?" she asked me, turning round after going through the gate. "I might teach French and English and German: and I am very fond of little children. The difficulty will be to get an introduction. I have thought of one person who might give it me—if I could only dare to ask him."

"Who's that?"

"Sir Robert Tenby. He is of the great world, and must know everybody in it. And he has always shown himself so very sociable and kind. Do you think I might venture to apply to him?"

"Why not? He could not eat you for it."

She ran on, and I ran back. But, all that day, sitting over her task of work, Anne was in a state of shilly-shally, not able to make up her mind. It was impossible to know how Sir Robert Tenby might take it.

"I have made you a drop of coffee and a bit of hot toast and butter, Miss Anne," said Sally, coming in with a small tray. "Buttered it well. She's not here to see it."

Anne laughed, and thanked her; Mrs. Lewis had left them only cold bacon for dinner, and ordered them to wait tea until her return. But before the refreshment was well disposed of, she and the girls came in.

"How soon you are back!" involuntarily cried Anne, hoping Mrs. Lewis would not smell the coffee. "And how are they all at Lake's?"

Mrs. Lewis answered by giving a snappish word to Lake's, and ordered Anne to get tea ready. Fanny whispered the information that they were going to Worcester on the morrow to stay over the Easter ball; but *not to Lake's*. Anne wondered at that.

Upon arriving at Lake's that morning, Miss Dinah had received them very coolly; and was, as Mrs. Lewis remarked afterwards, barely civil. The fact was, Miss Dinah, being just-minded, took up Anne's cause rather warmly; and did not scruple to think that the beguiling poor weak-minded Dr. Lewis out of the will he made, was just a piece of iniquity, and nothing

less. Perceiving Miss Dinah's crusty manner, Mrs. Lewis inquired after Mrs. Lake. "Where's Emma?" she asked.

"Very much occupied to-day. Can I do anything for you?"

"We are thinking of coming to you to-morrow for a week, Dinah; I and my two girls. They are wild to go to the Easter ball. Which rooms can you give us?"

"Not any rooms," spoke Miss Dinah, decisively. "We cannot take you in."

"Not take me in! When the servant opened the door to us she said the house was not full. I put the question to her."

"But we are expecting it to be full," said Miss Dinah, curtly. "The Beales generally come over to the ball; and we must keep rooms for them."

"You don't know that they are coming, I expect. And in a boarding-house the rule holds good, 'First come, first served.'"

"A boarding-house holds its own rules, and is not guided by other people's. Very sorry: but we cannot make room this time for you and your daughters."

"I'll soon see that," retorted Mrs. Lewis, getting hot. "Where's Emma Lake? I am her cousin, and shall insist on being taken in."

"She can't take you in without my consent. And she won't: that's more. Look here, Mrs. Podd—I beg your pardon—the new name does

not always come pat to me. When you were staying here before, and kept us so long out of our money, it put us to more inconvenience than you had any idea of. We——"

"You were paid at last."

"Yes," said Miss Dinah; "with poor Dr. Lewis's money, I expect. We made our minds up then, Mrs. Lewis, not to take you again. At least, *I* did; and Mrs. Lake agreed with me."

"You will not have to wait again: I have money in my pocket now. And the girls must go to the ball on Thursday."

"If your pockets are all full of money, it can make no difference to me. I'm sorry to say I cannot take you in, Mrs. Lewis: and now I have said all I mean to say."

Mrs. Lewis went about the house, looking for Mrs. Lake, and did not find her. She, not as strong minded as Miss Dinah, had bolted herself into the best bedroom, just then unoccupied. So Mrs. Lewis, not to be baffled as to the ball, went out to seek for other lodgings, and found them in the Foregate Street.

"But we shall be home on Saturday," she said to Anne, as they were starting this second time for Worcester, on the Wednesday morning, the finery for the ball behind them in two huge trunks. "I have to pay a great deal for the rooms, and can't afford to stay longer than that. And mind that you and Sally get the house in order while we are away; it's a beautiful oppor-

tunity to clean it thoroughly down : and get on as quickly as you can with the needle-work."

"Why, my dear young lassie, I am not able to help you in such a thing as this. You had better see the master himself."

Anne had lost no time. Leaving Sally to the cleaning, she dressed herself and walked over on the Wednesday afternoon to Bellwood, Sir Robert Tenby's seat. She explained her business to Mrs. Macbean, the old family housekeeper, and asked whether she could help her into any good family.

"Nae, nae, child. I live down here all my days, and I know nothing of the gentlefolks in the great world. The master knows 'em all."

"I did think once of asking if I might see Sir Robert ; but my courage fails me now," said Anne.

"And why should it ?" returned the old lady. "If there's one man more ready than another to do a kindness, or more sociable to speak with, it's Sir Robert Tenby. He takes after his mother for that, my late dear lady ; not after his father. Sir George was a bit proud. I'll go and tell Sir Robert what you want."

Sir Robert was in his favourite room ; a small one with a bright fire in it, its purple chairs and curtains bordered with gold. It was bright altogether, Anne thought as she entered : for he

said he would see her. The windows looked on a green velvet lawn, dotted with beds of early flowers, and thence to the park; and beyond all, to the chain of the Malvern hills, rising against the blue sky. The baronet sat near one of the windows, some books on a small table at his elbow. He came forward to shake hands with Anne, and gave her a chair opposite his own. And, what with his good homely face and its smile of welcome, and his sociable, unpretending words, Anne felt at home at once.

In her own quiet way, so essentially that of a lady in its unaffected truth, she told him what she wanted: to find a home in some good family, who would be kind to her in return for her services, and pay her as much as would serve to buy her gowns and bonnets. Sir Robert Tenby, no stranger to the gossip rife in the neighbourhood, had heard of the unjust will, and of Anne's treatment by the new wife.

"It is, I imagine, impossible for a young lady to get into a good family without an introduction," said Anne. "And I thought—perhaps—you might speak for me, sir: you do know a little of me. I have no one else to recommend me."

He did not answer for the moment: he sat looking at her. Anne blushed, and went on, hoping she was not offending him.

"No one else, I mean, who possesses your influence, and mixes habitually with the great

world. I should not care to take service in an inferior family: my poor father would not have liked it."

"Take service," said he, repeating the word. "It is as governess that you wish to go out?"

"As nursery governess, I thought. I may not aspire to any better position, for I know nothing of accomplishments. But little children need to be taught French and German; I could do that."

"You speak French well, of course?"

"As a native. German also. And I think I speak good English, and could teach it. And oh, sir, if you did chance to know of any family who would engage me, I should be so grateful to you."

"French, English, and German," said he, smiling. "Well, I can't tell what the great world, as you put it, may call accomplishments; but I think those three enough for anybody."

Anne smiled too. "They are only languages, Sir Robert. They are not music and drawing. Had my dear mamma suspected I should have to earn my own living, she would have had me educated for it."

"I think it is a very hard thing that you should have to earn it," spoke Sir Robert.

Anne glanced up through her wet eye-lashes: reminiscences of her mother always brought tears. "There's no help for it, sir; I have not a shilling in the world."

"And no home but one that you are ill-treated in—made to do the work of a servant? Is it not so?"

Anne coloured painfully. How did he know this? Generous to Mrs. Lewis in spite of all, she did not care to speak of it herself.

"And if people did not think me clever enough to teach, sir," she went on, passing over his question, "I might perhaps go out to be useful in other ways. I can make French cakes and show a cook how to make nice French dishes; and I can read aloud well, and do all kinds of needlework. Some old lady, who has no children of her own, might be glad to have me."

"I think many an old lady would," said he. The remark put her in spirits. She grew animated.

"Oh, do you! I am so glad. If you should know of one, sir, would you please to tell her of me?"

Sir Robert nodded, and Anne rose to leave. He rose also.

"If I could be so fortunate as to get into such a home as this, with some kind old lady for my friend and mistress, I should be quite happy," she said in the simplicity of her heart. "How pleasant this room is!—and how beautiful it is outside!"—pausing to look at the early flowers, as she passed the window.

"Do you know Bellwood? Were you ever here before?"

"No, sir, never."

Sir Robert put on his hat and went out with her, showing her some pretty spots about the grounds. Anne was enchanted, especially with the rocks and the cascades. Versailles, she thought, could not be better than Bellwood.

"And when you hear of anything, sir, you will please to let me know?" she said, in parting.

"Yes. You had better come again soon. This is Wednesday: suppose you call on Friday. Will you?"

"Oh, I shall be only too glad. I will be sure to come. Good-bye, Sir Robert: and thank you very, very much."

She went home with light heels and a lighter heart: she had not felt so happy since her father died.

"How good he is! how kind! a true gentleman," she thought. "And what a good thing he fixed Friday instead of Saturday, for on Saturday they will be at home. But it is hardly possible that he will have heard of any place by that time, unless he has one in his eye."

It was Friday afternoon before Anne could get to Bellwood, and rather late also. She asked, as before, for Mrs. Macbean, not presuming to ask direct for Sir Robert Tenby. Sir Robert was out, but was expected in every minute, and Anne waited in Mrs. Macbean's parlour.

"Do you think he has heard of anything for

me?" was one of the first questions she put.

"Eh, my dear, and how should I know?" was the old lady's reply. "He does not tell me of his affairs. Not but what he talks to me a good deal, and always like a friend: he does not forget that my late leddy, his mother, made more of a friend of me than a servant. Many's the half-hour he keeps me talking in his parlour; and always bids me take the easiest seat there. I wish he would marry!"

"Do you?" replied Anne, mechanically: for she was thinking more of her own concerns than Sir Robert's.

"Why, yes, that I do. It's a lonely life for him at best, the one he leads. I've not scrupled to tell him, times and oft, that he ought to bring a mistress home——Eh, but there he is! That's his step."

As before, Anne went into the pretty room that Sir Robert, when alone, mostly sat in. Three or four opened letters lay upon the table, and she wondered whether they related to her.

"No, I have as yet no news for you," he said, smiling at her eager face, and keeping her hand in his while he spoke. "You will have to come again for it. Sit down?"

"But if—if you have nothing to tell me to-day, I had better not take up your time," said Anne, not liking to appear intrusive.

"My time! If you knew how slowly time

some days seems to pass for me, you would have no scruple about 'taking it up.' Sit here. This is a pleasant seat."

With her eyes fixed on the outer landscape, Anne sat on and listened to him. He talked of various things, and she felt as much at her ease (as she told me that same evening) as though she had been talking with me. Afterwards she felt half afraid she had been too open, for she told him all about her childhood's home in France and her dear mother. It was growing dusk when she got up to go.

"Will you come again on Monday afternoon?" he asked. "I shall be out in the morning."

"If I can, sir. Oh yes, if I can. But Mrs. Lewis, who will be at home then, does not want me to take a situation at all, and she may not let me come out."

"I should come without telling her," smiled Sir Robert. "Not want you to leave home, eh? Would like you to stay there to make the puddings? Ay, I understand. Well, I shall expect you on Monday. There may be some news, you know."

And, somehow, Anne took up the notion that there would be news, his tone sounded so hopeful. All the way home her feet seemed to tread on air.

On the Sunday evening, when they were all sitting together at Maythorn Bank, and Anne had

no particular duty on hand, she took courage to tell of what she had done, and that Sir Robert Tenby was so good as to interest himself for her. Mrs. Lewis was indignant; the young ladies were pleasantly satirical.

"As nursery governess: you!" mocked Miss Julia. "What shall you teach your pupils? To play at cats' cradle?"

"Why, you know, Anne, you are not *fit* for a governess," said Fanny. "It would be quite —quite *wicked* of you to make believe to be one. You never learnt a note of music. You can't draw. You can't paint."

"You had better go to school yourself, first," snapped Mrs. Lewis. "I will not allow you to take any such step: so put all thought of it out of your head."

Anne leaned her aching brow upon her hand in perplexity. Was she so unfit? Would it be wicked? She determined to put the case fully before her kind friend, Sir Robert Tenby, and ask his opinion.

Providing that she could get to Sir Robert's. Ask leave to go, she dare not; for she knew the answer would be a point-blank refusal.

But fortune favoured her. Between three and four o'clock on Monday afternoon, Mrs. Lewis and her daughters dressed themselves and sailed away to call on some people at South Crabb; which lay in just the contrary direction to Bellwood. They left Anne a heap of sewing

to do : but she left the sewing and went out on her own score. I met her near the Ravine. She told me what she had done, and looked bright and flushed over it.

" Mrs. Lewis is one cat, and they are two other cats, Anne. Tod says so. Good-bye. Good luck to you!"

" Eh, my dear, and I was beginning to think you didna mean to come," was Mrs. Macbean's salutation. " But Sir Robert is nae back yet, he has been out on horseback since the morning ; and he said you were to wait for him. So just take your bonnet off, and you shall have a cup of tea with me!"

Nothing loth, Anne took off her out-of-doors things. " They will be home before I am, and find me gone out," she reflected ; " but they can't quite kill me for it." The old lady rang her bell for tea, and thought what a nice and pretty young gentlewoman Anne looked in her plain black dress with its white neck-frill, and the handsome jet necklace that had been her mother's.

But before the tea could be made, Sir Robert Tenby's horse trotted up, and they heard him go to his sitting-room. Mrs. Macbean took Anne into his presence, saying at the same time that she had been about to give the young lady a cup of tea.

" I should like some tea too," said Sir Robert ; " Miss Lewis can take it with me. Send it in."

It came in upon a waiter, and was placed upon

the table. Anne, at his request, put sugar and cream into his cup, handed it to him, and then took her own. He was looking very thoughtful; she seemed to fancy he had no good news for her, as he did not speak of it; and her heart went down, down. In a very timid tone, she told him of the depreciating opinion held of her talents at home, and begged him to say what *he* thought, for she would not like to be guilty of undertaking any duty she was not fully competent to fulfil.

"Will you take some more tea?" was all Sir Robert said in answer.

"No, thank you, sir."

"Another biscuit? No? We will send the tray away then."

Ringing the bell, a servant came in and took the things. Sir Robert, standing at the window then, and looking down at Anne as she sat, began to speak.

"I think there might be more difficulty in getting you a situation as governess than we thought for: one that would be quite suitable, at least. Perhaps another kind of situation would do better for you."

Her whole face, turned up to him with its gaze of expectancy, changed to sadness; the light in her eyes died away. It seemed so like the knell of all her hopes. Sir Robert only smiled.

"If you could bring yourself to take it—and to like it," he continued.

"But what situation is it, sir?"

"That of my wife. That of lady of Bellwood."

Just for a moment or two, she simply stared at him. When his meaning reached her comprehension, her face turned red and white with emotion. Sir Robert took her hand and spoke more fully. He had learnt to like her very very much, to esteem her, and wished her to be his wife.

"I am aware that there is a good deal of difference in our ages, my dear; more than twenty years," he went on, while she sat in silence. "But I think you might find happiness with me; I will do my very best to ensure it. Better be my wife than a nursery governess. What do you say?"

"Oh, sir, I do not know what to say," she answered, trembling a little. "It is so unexpected—and a great honour—and—and I am overwhelmed."

"Could you like me?" he gently asked.

"I do like you, sir; very much. But this—this would be different. Perhaps you would let me take until to-morrow to think about it?"

"Of course I will. Bring me your answer then. Bring it yourself, whatever it may be."

"I will, sir. And I thank you very greatly."

All night long Anne Lewis lay awake. Should she take this good man for her husband, or should she not? She did like him very much: and what a position it would be for her; and

how sheltered she would be henceforth from the frowns of the world! Anne might never have hesitated, but for the remains of her love for Mr. Angerstyne. That was passing away from her heart day by day, as she knew; it would soon have passed entirely. She could never feel that same love again; it was over and done with for ever; but there was surely no reason why she should sacrifice all her future to its remembrance. *Yes:* she would accept Sir Robert Tenby: and would, by the help of Heaven, make him a true, faithful, good wife.

It was nearly dusk the next afternoon before she could leave the house. Mrs. Lewis had kept her in sight so long that she feared she might not get the opportunity that day. She ran all the way to Bellwood, anxious to keep her promise: she could not bear to seem to trifle, even for a moment, with this good and considerate man. Sir Robert was waiting for her in a glow of fire-light. He came forward, took both her hands in his, and looked into her face inquiringly.

"Well?"

"Yes, sir, if you still wish to take me. I will try to be to you a loving wife; obedient and faithful."

With a sigh of relief, he sat down on a sofa that was drawn to the fire and placed her beside him, holding her hand still.

"My dear, I thank you: you have made

me very happy. You shall *never* have cause to repent it."

"It is so strange," she whispered, "that you should wait all these years, with the world to choose from, and then think of *me* at last! I can scarcely believe it."

"Ay, I suppose it is strange. But I must tell you something, Anne. When quite a youth, only one-and-twenty, there was a young lady whom I dearly loved. She was poor, and not of much family, and my father forbade the union. She married some one else, and died. It is for the love of her I have kept single all these years. But I shall not make you the less good husband."

"And I—I wish to tell you—that *I* once cared for some one," whispered Anne in her straightforward honesty. "It is all over and done with; but I did like him very much."

"Then, my dear, we shall be even," he said, with a merry smile. "The one cannot reproach the other. And now—this is the beginning of April: before the month shall have closed you had better come to me. We have nothing to wait for; and I do not like, now that you belong to me, to leave you one moment longer than is needful with that lady whom you are forced to call stepmother."

How Anne got home that late afternoon she hardly knew: she knew still less how to bring the news out. In the course of the following

morning, she tried at it, and made a bungle of it.

"Sir Robert not going to get you a situation as governess!" interrupted Julia, before Anne had half finished. "Of course he is not. He knows you are not capable of taking one. *I* thought how much he was intending to help you. You must have had plenty of *cheek*, Anne, to trouble him."

"I am going to be his wife instead," said poor Anne, meekly. "He has asked me to be. And—and it is to be very soon; and he is coming to see Mrs. Lewis this morning."

Mrs. Lewis, sitting back in an easy-chair, her feet on the fender, dropped the book she was reading, to stare at Anne. Julia burst into a laugh of incredulity. Her mother echoed it, and spoke:

"You poor infatuated girl! This comes of being brought up on French soup. But Sir Robert Tenby has no right to play jokes upon you. I shall write and tell him so."

"I—think—he is there," stammered Anne.

There he was. A handsome carriage was drawing up to the gate, bearing the baronet's badge upon its panels. Sir Robert sat inside. A footman came up the path and thundered at the door.

Not very long afterwards—it was in the month of June—Anne and her husband were guests at a London crush in Berkeley Square.

It was too crowded to be pleasant. Anne began to look tired, and Sir Robert whispered to her that if she had had enough of it, they would go home. "Very gladly," she answered, and turned to say good-night to her hostess.

"Anne! How are you?"

The unexpected interruption, in a voice she knew quite well, and which sent a thrill through her, even yet, pulled Anne up in her course. There stood Henry Angerstyne, his hand held out in greeting, a confident smile, as if assuming she could only receive him joyfully, on his handsome face.

"I am so much surprised to see you here; so delighted to meet you once again, Miss Lewis."

"You mistake, sir," replied Anne, in a cold, proud tone, drawing her head a little up. "I am Lady Tenby."

Walking forward, she put her arm within her husband's, who waited for her. Mr. Angerstyne understood it at once; it needed not the almost bridal robes of white silk and lace to enlighten him. She was not altered. She looked just the same single-minded, honest-hearted girl as ever, with a pleasant word for all—save just in the moment when she had spoken to him.

"I am glad of it: she deserves her good fortune," he thought heartily. With all his faults, few men could be more generously just than Henry Angerstyne.

II.

THE KEY OF THE CHURCH.

"JOHNNY, you will have to take the organ on Sunday."

The words gave me a surprise. I turned short round on the music-stool, wondering whether Mrs. Todhetley spoke in jest or earnest. But her face was quite serious, as she sat, her hands on her lap, and her lame finger—the fore-finger on the left hand—stretched out.

"I take the organ, good mother! What's that for?"

"Because I was to have taken it, Johnny, and this accident to my finger will prevent it."

We had just got home to Dyke Manor from school for the Michaelmas holidays. Not a week of them: for this was Wednesday afternoon, and we should go back the following Monday. Mrs. Todhetley had cut her finger very seriously in carving some cold beef on the previous day. Old Duffham had put it into splints.

"Where's Mr. Richards?" I asked, alluding to the church organist.

"Well, it is rather a long tale, Johnny. A good deal of dissatisfaction has existed, as you know, between him and the congregation."

"Through his fiercely-loud playing."

"Just so. And now he has resigned in a huff. Mr. Holland called yesterday morning to ask if I would help them at the pinch by taking the organ for a Sunday or two, until matters were smoothed with Richards, or else some fresh organist found; and I promised him I would. In the evening, this accident happened to my finger. So you must take it in my place, Johnny."

"And if I break down?"

"Not you. Why should you?"

"I am out of practice."

"There's plenty of time to get up your practice between now and Sunday. Don't make objections, my dear. We should all do what little we can to help others in a time of need."

I said no more. As she observed, there was plenty of time between now and Sunday. And, not to lose time, I went off there and then.

The church stood in a lonely spot, as I think you know, and I took the way across the fields to it. Whistling softly, I went along, fixing in my mind upon the chants and hymns. Ours was rather a primitive service. The organ repertoire included only about half a score of chants and double that number of hymns. It had this advantage—that they were all familiar to the

congregation, who could join in the singing at will, and the singers had no need to practise. Mr. Richards had lately introduced a different style of music, and it was not liked.

"Let me see: I'll make it just the opposite of Richards's. For the morning we will have the thirty-seventh psalm, 'Depend on God:' there's real music in that; and 'Jerusalem the Golden.' And for the afternoon, 'Abide with me,' and the Evening Hymn. Mornington's Chant; and the Grand Chant; and the—— Halloa, Fred! Is it you?"

A lithe, straight-limbed young fellow was turning out of the little valley: on his way (as I guessed) from the Parsonage. It was Fred Westerbrook: old Westerbrook's nephew at the Narrow Dyke Farm—or, as we abbreviated it, the N. D. Farm.

"How are you, Johnny?"

His face and voice were alike subdued as he shook hands. I asked after Mr. and Mrs. Westerbrook.

"They are both well for aught I know," he answered. "The N. D. Farm is no longer my home, Johnny."

Had he told me the Manor was no longer mine, I could not have been more surprised.

"Why, how is that, Fred?"

"They have turned me out of it."

"What—this morning?"

"This morning—no. Two months ago."

"And why? I never thought it would come to that."

"Because they wanted to get rid of me, that's why. Gisby has been the prime mover in it—the chief snake in the grass. He is worse than she is."

"And what are you doing?"

"Nothing: except knocking about. I'd be off to America to-morrow and try my luck there if I had a fifty-pound note in my pocket. I went up to the farm last week, and made an appeal to my uncle to help me to it, and be rid of me——"

"And would he?" I interrupted, too eager to let him finish.

"*Would he!*" repeated Fred, savagely. "He bade me go to a place unmentionable. He threatened to drive me off the premises if ever I put foot on them again."

"I am very sorry. What shall you do?" I asked.

"Heaven knows! Perhaps turn poacher."

"Nonsense, Fred!"

"*Is* it nonsense!" he retorted, taking off his low-crowned hat and passing his hand passionately over his wavy, auburn hair—about the nicest hair I ever saw. People said Fred was proud of it. He was a good-looking young fellow altogether; with a clear, fresh face, and steady grey eyes.

"You don't know what it is to be *goaded*,

Johnny," he said. "I can tell you I am ripe for any mischief. And a man must live. But for one thing I swear I'd not keep straight."

I knew what thing he meant quite well. "What does she say about it?" I asked.

"What can she say? My uncle has insulted her to her face, and made me out at the Parsonage to be a downright scamp. Oh, I go in for all that's bad, according to him, I assure you, Johnny Ludlow."

"Do you never see her?"

"It is chiefly by chance if I do. I have just been up there now, sitting for half an hour with her in the old study. There was no opportunity for a private word, though; the young ones were dodging around, playing at 'Salt Fish'—if you know the delectable game. Goodbye, Johnny lad."

He strode off with an angry fire in his eye. I felt very sorry for him. We all liked Fred Westerbrook. He had his faults, I suppose, but he was one of the most open-natured fellows in the world.

Dashing in at Clerk Bumford's for the key of the church, I sat down to the organ: an antiquated instrument, whose bellows were worked by the player's feet, as are some of the modern harmoniums; but, as far as tone went, it was not bad—rather rich and sweet. All through the practice my mind was running on Fred Westerbrook and his uncle. The parish had

said long ago they would come to a blow-up some time.

The N. D. Farm stood about three-quarters of a mile on the other side the church, beyond Mr. Page's. It had a good house upon it, and consisted of two or three hundred acres of land. But its owner, Mr. Westerbrook, rented a great deal more land that lay contiguous to it, which rendered it altogether one of the most considerable farms round about. Up to fifty years of age, Mr. Westerbrook had not married. Fred, his dead brother's son, had been adopted by him, and was regarded as his heir. The farm had been owned by the Westerbrooks for untold-of years, and it was not likely a stranger in blood and name would be allowed to inherit it. So Fred had lived there as the son and heir, and been made much of.

But, to the surprise of everybody, Mr. Westerbrook took it into his head to marry, although he was fifty years old. It was thought to be a foolish act, and the parish talked freely. She was a widow without children, of a grasping nature, and not at all nice in temper. A high-spirited boy of fourteen, as Fred was, would be hardly likely to get on with her. She interfered with him in the holidays, and thwarted him, and told sneaking tales of him to his uncle. It went on pretty smoothly enough, however, until Fred left school, which he did at eighteen, to take up his abode at home for good and busy himself

about the farm. Upon the death of the bailiff some three years later, she sent for one Gisby, from a distance, and got Mr. Westerbrook to instal him in the bailiff's vacant place. This Gisby was a dark little man of middle age, and was said to be distantly related to her. He proved to be an excellent farmer and manager, and did his duty well; but from the first he and Fred were just at daggers-drawn. Presuming upon his relationship to the mistress, Gisby treated Fred in an off-hand manner, telling him sometimes to do this and not to do the other, as he did the men. Of course, Fred did not stand that, and offered to pitch him into next week unless he kept his place better.

But, as the years went on, the antagonism against Fred penetrated to Mr. Westerbrook. She was always at work with her covert whispers, as was Gisby with his outspoken accusations of him, and with all sorts of tales of his wrong-doing. They had the ear of the master, and Fred could not fight against it. Perhaps he did not try to. Whispering, and meanness, and underhand doing of any kind, were foreign to his nature; he was rather too outspoken, and he turned on his enemies freely and gave them plenty of abuse. It was Gisby who first told Mr. Westerbrook of the intimacy, or friendship, or whatever you may please to call it, though I suppose the right word would be *love*, between Fred and Edna Blake. Edna

was one of a large family, and had come, a year or two ago, to live at the Parsonage, being niece to Mrs. Holland, the parson's wife. Mrs. Holland was generally ill (and frightfully incapable), and Edna had it all on her hands : the housekeeping, and the six unruly children, and the teaching and the mending, and often the cooking. They paid her twenty pounds a year for it. But she was a charming girl, with one of the sweetest faces ever seen and the gentlest spirit. Fred Westerbrook had found that out, and the two were deeply in love with one another. Old Mr. Westerbrook went into one of his passions when he heard of it, and swore at Fred. Edna was not his equal, he told him ; Fred must look higher : she had no money, and her friends, as was reported, were but tradespeople. Fred retorted that Edna was a mine of wealth and goodness in herself, and he had never troubled himself to ask what her friends might be. However, to make short of the story, matters had grown more unpleasant for Fred day by day, and this appeared to be the end of it, the turning him out of house and home. He was just twenty-four now. I don't wish to imply that Fred was without faults, or that he did nothing to provoke his uncle. He had been wild the last year or two, and tumbled into some scrapes ; but the probability is that he would have kept straight enough under more favourable circumstances. The discomfort at home drove him

out, and he got associating with anything but choice company.

Making short work of my playing, I took the key back to Bumford's, and ran home. Tod was in the dining-room with the mother, and I told them of the meeting with Fred Westerbrook. Mrs. Todhetley seemed to know all about it, and said Fred had been living at the Silver Bear.

"What an awful shame of old Westerbrook!" broke out Tod. "To turn a fellow away from his home!"

"I am afraid there are faults on both sides," sighed Mrs. Todhetley, in her gentle way. "Fred has not borne a good character of late."

"And who could expect him to bear a good one?" fired Tod. "If I were turned out like a dog, would I care what I did? No! Old Westerbrook and that precious wife of his ought to be kicked. As to Gisby, the sneak, hanging would be too good for him."

"Don't, Joseph."

"*Don't!*" retorted Tod. "But I do. They deserve all the abuse that can be given them. I can see her game. She wants Westerbrook to leave the property to her: that's the beginning and the end of it; and to cut off poor Fred with a shilling."

"Of course we are all sorry for Fred, Joseph," resumed the mother. "Very sorry. I know I

am. But he need not do reckless things, and lose his good name."

"Bother his good name!" cried Tod. "Look at their interference about Edna Blake. That news came out when we were at home at midsummer. Edna is as good as they are."

"It is a hopeless case, I fear, Joseph. Discarded by his uncle, all his prospects are at an end. He has been all on the wrong track lately, and done many a sad thing."

"I don't care what he has done. He has been driven to it. And I'll stand up for him through thick and thin."

Tod flung out of the room with the last words. It was just like him, putting himself into a way for nothing. It was like somebody else too—his father. I began telling Mrs. Todhetley of the chants and hymns I had thought of, asking her if they would do.

"None could be better, Johnny. And I only wish you might play for us always."

A fine commotion arose next morning. We were at breakfast, when Thomas came in to say old Jones, the constable, wanted to see the Squire immediately. Old Jones was bade to enter; he appeared all on the shake, and his face as white as a sheet. There had been murder done in the night, he said. Master Fred Westerbrook had shot Gisby: and he had come to get a warrant signed for Fred's apprehension.

"Goodness bless me!" cried the Squire, letting fall his knife and fork, and turning to face old Jones. "How on earth did it happen?"

"Well, your worship, 'twere a poaching affray," returned Jones. "Gisby the bailiff have had his suspicions o' the game, and he went out last night with a man or two, and met the fellows in the open field on this side the copse. There they was, in the bright moonlight, as bold as brass, with a bag o' game, Master Fred Westerbrook the foremost on 'em. A fight ensued—Gisby don't want for pluck, he don't, though he be undersized, and he attacked 'em. Master Fred up with his gun and shot him."

"Is Gisby dead?"

"No, sir, but he's a-dying."

"What a fool that Fred Westerbrook must be!" stormed the Squire. "And I declare I liked the young fellow amazingly! It was only last night, Jones, that we were talking of him here, taking his part against his uncle."

"He haven't been after much good, Squire, since he went to live at that there Silver Bear. Not but what the inn's as respectable——"

"Respectable!—I should like to know where you would find a more respectable inn, or one better conducted!" put in Tod, with scant ceremony. "What do you mean, old Jones? A gentleman can take up his abode at the Silver Bear, and not be ashamed of it."

"I have nothing to say again' it, sir; nor against Rimmer neither. It warn't the inn I was a-reflecting on, but on Master Fred himself."

"Anyway, I don't believe this tale, Jones."

"Not believe it!" returned Jones, aghast at the bold assertion. "Why, young Mr. Todhetley, the whole parish is a-ringing with it. There's Gisby a-dying at Shepherd's—which was the place he were carried to, being the nearest; and Shepherd himself saw young Mr. Fred fire off the gun."

"What became of the rascally poachers?" asked the Squire. "Who were they?"

"They got clean off, sir, every one on 'em. And they couldn't be recognised: they had blackened their faces. Master Fred was the only one who had not disguised hisself, which was just like his boldness. They left the game behind 'em, your worship: a nice lot o' pheasants and partridges. Pheasants too, the miscreants! —and October not in."

There was not much more breakfast for us. Tod rushed off, and I after him. As Jones had said, the whole parish was ringing with the news, and we found people standing about in groups to talk. The particulars appeared to be as old Jones had related. Gisby, taking Shepherd—who was the herdsman on the N. D. Farm—with him, and another man named Ford, had gone out to watch for poachers; had met half a

dozen of them, including Fred Westerbrook, and Fred had shot Gisby.

The Silver Bear stood in the middle of Church Dykely, next door to Perkins the butcher's. It was kept by Henry Rimmer. We made for it, wondering whether Rimmer could tell us anything. He was in the tap-room, polishing the taps.

"Oh, it's true enough, young gentlemen!" he said, as we burst in upon him with questions. "And a dreadful thing it is. One can't help pitying young Mr. Westerbrook."

"Look here, Rimmer: do you believe he did it?"

"Why, in course he did, Master Johnny. There was no difficulty in knowing him: he was the only one of 'em not disguised. Shepherd says the night was as light as day. Gisby and him and Ford all saw young Mr. Westerbrook, and knew him as soon as the lot came in sight."

"Was he at home here last evening?" asked Tod.

"He was at home here, sir, till after supper. He had been out in the afternoon, and came in to his tea between five and six. Then he stayed in till supper-time, and went out afterwards."

"Did he come in later?"

"No, never," replied Rimmer, lowering his voice, as a man sometimes does when speaking very seriously. "He never came in again."

"They say Gisby can't recover. Is that true, or not?"

"It is thought he'll not live through the day, sir."

"And where can Westerbrook be hiding himself?"

"He's safe inside the hut of one or other of the poachers, I should say," nodded the landlord. "Not that that would be safe for him or for them, if it could be found out who the villains were. I think I could give a guess at two or three of them."

"So could I," said Tod. "Dick Standish was one, I know. And Jelf another. Of course, their haunts will be searched. Don't you think, Rimmer, Mr. Fred Westerbrook would rather make off, than run the risk of concealing himself in any one of them?"

Rimmer shook his head. "I don't know about that, sir. He might not be able to make off. It's thought he was wounded."

"Wounded!"

"Gisby fired his own gun in the act of falling, and Shepherd thinks the charge hit young Mr. Westerbrook. The poachers were running off then, and Shepherd saw them halt in a kind of heap like, and he is positive that the one on the ground was Mr. Westerbrook. For that reason, sir, I should say the chances are he is somewhere in the neighbourhood."

Of course it looked like it. Strolling away

to pick up anything else that people might be saying, we gave Fred our best wishes for his escape—in spite of the shot—and for effectually dodging old Jones and the rest of the Philistines. Tod made no secret of his sentiments.

"It's a thing that might have happened to you or to me, you see, Johnny, were we turned out of doors and driven to bay as Fred has been."

By the afternoon, great staring hand-bills were posted about, written in enormous text-hand, offering a reward of £20 for the apprehension of Frederick Westerbrook. When old Westerbrook was incensed, he went in for the whole thing, and no mistake.

What with the bustle the place was in, and the excitement of the chase—for all the hedges and ditches, the barns and the suspected dwellings were being looked up by old Jones and a zealous crowd, anxious for the reward—it was not until after dinner in the evening that I got away to practice. Going along, I met Duffham, and asked after Gisby.

"I am on my way to Shepherd's now," he answered. "I suppose he is still alive, as they have not sent me word to the contrary."

"Is he sure to die, Mr. Duffham?"

"I fear so, Johnny. I don't see much chance of saving him."

"What a dreadful thing for Fred Westerbrook! They may bring it in wilful murder."

"That they will be sure to do. Good-evening, lad; I have no time to linger with you."

Bumford was probably looking out for the fugitive (and the reward) on his own score, as he was not to be seen; but I found the key inside the knife-box on the kitchen dresser, his store-place for it, opened the door, and went into the church.

On one side the church-door, as you entered, was an enclosed place underneath the belfry, that did for the vestry and for Clerk Bumford's den. He kept his store of candles in it, his gravedigging tools (for he was sexton as well as clerk), his Sunday black gown, and other choice articles. On the other side of the door, not enclosed, was the nook that contained the organ. I sat down at once. But I had come too late; for in half an hour's time, the notes of the music and the keys were alike dim. Just then Bumford entered.

"Oh, you be here, be you!" said he, treating me, as he did the rest of the world, with scant ceremony. "I thought I heered the organ a-going, so I come on to see."

"You were not indoors, Bumford, when I called for the key."

"I were only in the field at the back, a-getting up some dandelion roots," returned old Bumford, in his usual resentful tone. "There ain't no obligation in me to be shut in at home everlasting."

"Who said there was?"

"Ain't it a'most too dark for you?"

"Yes, I shall have to borrow one of your candles."

Bumford grunted at this. The candles were not strictly his; they were paid for by the parish; but he set great store by them, and would have denied me one if he could. Not seeing his way clear to do this, he turned away, muttering to himself. I took my fingers off the keys—for I had been playing while I talked to him—and followed. Bumford went out of the church, shutting the door with a bang, and I proceeded to search for the candlestick.

That was soon found: it always stood on the shelf; but it had no candle in it, and I opened the candle-box to take one out. All the light that came in was from the open slits in the belfry above. The next thing was to find the matches.

Groping about quietly with my hands on the shelf, for fear of knocking down some article or another, and wondering where on earth the match-box had gone to, I was interrupted by a groan. A loud, dismal groan, coming from the middle of the church.

It nearly made me start out of my skin. My shirt-sleeves went damp. Down with us, the ghosts of the buried dead are popularly supposed to haunt the churches at night.

"It must have been the pulpit creaking,"

said I, gravely to myself. "Oh, here's the match——"

An awful groan! Another! Three groans altogether! I stood as still as death; calling up the recollection that God was with me inside the church as well as out of it. Frightened I was, and it is of no use to deny it.

"I wonder what the devil is to be the ending of this!"

The unorthodox words burst upon my ears, bringing a reassurance, for dead people don't talk, let alone their natural objection (as one must suppose) to mention the arch-enemy. The tones were free and distinct; and——I knew them for Fred Westerbrook's.

"Fred, is that you?" I asked in a half whisper, as I went forward.

No sound; no answer.

"Fred! it's only I."

Not a word or a breath. I struck a match, and lighted a candle.

"You need not be afraid, Fred. Come along. I'll do anything I can for you. Don't you know me?—Johnny Ludlow."

"For the love of heaven, put that light out, Johnny!" he said, feeling it perhaps useless to hold out, or else deciding to trust me, as he came down the aisle in a stooping position, so that the pews might hide him from the windows. And I put it out.

"I thought you had gone out of the church

with old Bumford," said he. "I heard you both come away from the organ, and then the door was banged, leaving the church to silence."

"I was searching after the candle and matches. When did you come here, Fred? How did you get in?"

"I got in last night. Is there much of a row, Johnny?"

"Pretty well. How came you to do it?"

"To do what?"

"Shoot Gisby."

"It was not I that shot him."

"Not you!"

"Certainly not."

"But—people are saying it was you. You were with the poachers."

"I was with the poachers; and one of them, like the confounded idiot that he was, pointed his gun, and fired it. I recognised the cry of pain for Gisby's, and knew that the charge must have struck him. I never had a gun in my hand at all, Johnny."

Well, I felt thankful for that. We sat down on the bench, and Fred told his tale.

After supper the previous night, he strolled out and met some fellow he knew, who lived two or three miles away. (A black sheep in the public estimation, like himself.) It was a beautiful night. Fred chose to see him home, and stayed there, drinking a glass or two, till he knew not what hour. Coming back across the

fields, he fell in with the poachers. Instead of denouncing them, he told them half in joke, half in earnest, that he might be joining their band himself before the winter was over. Close upon that, they fell in with the watchers, Gisby and the rest. Fred knew he was recognised, for Gisby called out his name; and, that, Fred did not like: it made things look black against him. Gisby attacked them; a scuffle ensued, and one of the poachers used his gun. Then the poachers turned to run, Fred with them; a shot was fired after them and hit one of their body—but not Fred, as Rimmer had supposed. The man tripped as the shot struck him, and caused Fred to trip and fall; but both were up, and off, the next moment. Where the rest escaped to, Fred did not know; chance led him past the church: on the spur of the moment he entered it for refuge, and had been there ever since.

"And it is a great and good thing you did enter it, Fred," I said eagerly. "Gisby swears it was you that shot him, and he is dying; and Shepherd swears it too."

"Gisby dying?"

"He is. I met Duffham as I came here; he told me there was little, if any, chance of his life: he had been expecting news of his death all the afternoon. They have posted hand-bills up, offering a reward of £20 for your apprehension, Fred; and—and I am afraid, and so is Duffham, that they will try you for wilful

murder. The whole neighbourhood is being searched for you for miles round."

"Pleasant!" said Fred, after a brief silence. "I had meant to go out to-night and endeavour to ascertain how the land lay. Of course I knew that what could be put upon my back would be put; and there's no denying that I was with the poachers. But I did not think matters would be as bad as this. Hang it all!"

"But, Fred, how did you get in here?"

"Well," said he, "we hear talk of providential occurrences: there's nothing Mr. Holland is fonder of telling us about in his sermons than the guiding finger of God. If the means that enabled me to take refuge here were not providential, Johnny, I must say they looked like it. When I met you yesterday afternoon, you must remember my chancing to say that the little Hollands were playing at 'Salt Fish' in the study, while I sat there, talking to Edna?"

Of course I remembered it. Does the reader know the game? I have played at it scores of times when a little fellow. One of a group of children hides some small article, while the rest go outside the door. When the hiding is accomplished, he flings open the door, and calls out "Salt Fish, very well buttered." They come in to search. When near the hiding-place, the hider says, "You burn, you burn!" and when far away from it, "You are cold, you are cold!"

and whichever of them finds the article is the one to hide it next.

"Directly after I left you, Johnny," resumed Fred Westerbrook, "I put my hand in my tail-coat pocket for my handkerchief, and found a large key there. It was the key of the church, that the children had been hiding at their play; and I understood in a moment that Charley, whose turn it was to hide last, had made a hiding-place of my pocket. The parson keeps one key, you know, and Bumford the other——"

"But, Fred," I interrupted, the question striking me, "how came the young ones to let you come away with it?"

"Because, lad, their attention got diverted to something else. Ann brought in the tea-things, with a huge plate of bread and treacle: they screamed out in delight, and scuffled to get seats round the table. Well, I let the key lie in my pocket," went on Fred, "intending to take it back to-day. In the night, when flying from pursuit, not knowing who, or how many, might be after me, I felt this heavy key strike against me continually; and, in nearing the church, the thought flashed over me like an inspiration: What if I open it and hide myself there? Just as young Charley had hidden the key in my pocket, so I hid myself, by its means, in the church."

Taking a minute to think over what he said, it did seem strange. One of those curious

things one can hardly account for; the means for his preservation were so simply natural and yet almost marvellous. Perhaps the church was the only building where he could have found secure refuge. Private dwellings would refuse to shelter him, and other places were sure to be searched.

"You are safe here, Fred. Nobody would ever think of seeking you here."

"Safe, yes; but for how long? I can't live without food for ever, Johnny. As it is, I have eaten none since last night."

My goodness! A shock of remorse came over me. When I was at old Bumford's knife-box, a loaf of bread stood on the dresser. If I had but secured it!

"We must manage to bring you something, Fred. You cannot stir from here."

Fred had taken the key out, having returned it to his pocket in the night when he locked himself in. He sat looking at it as he balanced it on his finger.

"Yes, you have served me in good need," he said to the key. "I shall turn out for a stroll during some quiet hour of the night, Johnny. To keep my restless legs curbed indoors for a whole day and night would be quite beyond their philosophy."

"Well, take care of yourself if you do. There's not a soul in the place but is all agape for the reward; and I dare say they will look for

you by night more than by day. How about getting you in something to eat ?"

"*I* don't know," he answered. "It would never do for you to be seen coming in here at night."

I knew that. Old Bumford would be down on me if nobody else was. I sat turning over possibilities in my mind.

"I will come in betimes to-morrow morning under the plea of practising, Fred, and bring what I can. You must do battle with your hunger until then."

"I suppose I must, Johnny. Mind you lock the door when you come in, or old Bumford might pounce upon us. When I heard you unlock it on coming in this evening, I can tell you I shivered in my shoes. Fate is very hard," he added, after a pause.

"Fate is ?"

"Why, yes. I have been a bit wild lately, perhaps, savage too, but I declare before Heaven that I have committed no crime, and did not mean to commit any. And now, to have this serious thing fastened upon my back! The world will say I have gone straight over to Satan."

I did not see how he would get it off his back either. Wishing him good-night and a good heart, I turned to go.

"Wait a moment, Johnny. Let me go back to my hiding-place first."

He went swiftly up the aisle, lighter now than it had been, for the moonlight was streaming in at the windows. Locking the church safely, I crossed the graveyard to old Bumford's. He was seated at his round table at supper: bread and cheese, and beer.

"Oh, Mr. Bumford, as I have to come into the church very early in the morning, or I shall never get my music up for Sunday, I will take the key home with me. Good-night."

He shouted out fifteen denials: How dared I think o' taking the key out of his custody! But I was conveniently deaf, rushed off, and left him shouting.

"What a long practice you have been taking, Johnny!" cried Mrs. Todhetley. "And how hot you look. You must have run very fast."

The Squire turned round from his arm-chair. "You've been joining in the hunt after that scamp, Mr. Johnny;—you've not been in the church, sir, all this while. I hear there's a fine pack out, scouring the hedges and the ditches."

"I got a candle from old Bumford's den," said I, evasively. And presently I contrived to whisper unseen to Tod—who sat reading—to come outside. Standing against the wall of the pigeon-house, I told him all. For once in his life Tod was astonished.

"What a stunning thing!" he exclaimed. "Good luck, Fred! we'll help you. I knew he was innocent, Johnny. Food? Yes, of

course ; we must get it for him. Molly, you say ? Molly be shot !"

"Well, you know what Molly is, Tod. Let half a grain of suspicion arise, and it might betray him. If she saw us rifling her larder, she would go straight to the Squire ; and what excuse should we have ?"

"Look here, Johnny. I'll go out fishing to-morrow, you understand, and order her to make a lot of meat pasties."

"But he must have something to eat to-morrow morning, Tod : he might die of hunger, else, before night."

Tod nodded. He had little more diplomacy than the Squire, and would have liked to perch himself upon the highest pillar in the parish there and then, and proclaim Fred Westerbrook's innocence.

We stole round to the kitchen. The supper was over, but the servants were still at the table ; no chance of getting to the larder then. Molly was in one of her tempers, apparently blowing up Thomas. There might be more chance in the morning.

Morning light. Tod went downstairs with the dawn, and I followed him. Not a servant was yet astir. He laid hold of a great tray, lodged it on the larder-floor, and began putting some things upon it—a cold leg of mutton and a big round loaf.

"I can't take in all *that*, Tod. It is daylight, you know, and eyes may be about: old Bumford's are sure to be. I can only take in what can be concealed in my pockets."

"Oh, bother, Johnny! You'd half famish him."

"Better half famish him than betray him. Some slices of bread and meat will be the best—thick sandwiches, you know."

We soon cut into the mutton and the bread. Wrapping them in paper, I stowed the thick slices away in my pockets, leaving the rest of the loaf and meat on the shelves again.

"How I wish I could smuggle him in a bottle of beer!"

"And so you can, Johnny. Swear to old Bumford it is for your own drinking."

"He would know better."

"Wrap a sheet of music round the bottle, then. He could make nothing of that."

Hunting out a bottle, we went down to the cellar. Tod stooped to fill it from the tap. I stood watching the process.

"I've caught you, Master Johnny, have I! What be you about there, letting the ale run, I'd like to know?"

The screamed-out words were Molly's. She had come down and found us out: suspecting something, I suppose, from seeing the cellar-door open. Tod rose up.

"I am drawing some beer to take out with

me. Is it any business of yours? When it is, you may interfere."

I was nobody in the household—never turning upon them. She'd have gone on at me for an hour, and probably walked off with the beer. Tod was altogether different. He held his own authority, even with Molly. She went up the cellar-stairs, grumbling to herself.

"I want a cork for this bottle," said bold Tod, following her. And Molly, opening some receptacle of hers with a jerk, perforce found him one.

"Oh, and I shall want some meat pasties made to-day, for I think of going fishing," went on Tod. "Let them be ready by lunch-time. I have cut myself some slices of meat to go on with—if you chance to miss any mutton."

Molly, never answering, left her kitchen-grate, where she was beginning to crack up the huge flat piece of coal that the fire had been raked with the previous night, and stalked into the larder to see what depredations had been done. We tied up the bottle in paper on the parlour-table, and then wrapped it in a sheet of loose music. It looked a pretty thick roll; but nobody would be likely to remark that.

"I have a great mind to go with you and see him, Johnny," said Tod, as we went together down the garden path.

"Oh, don't, Tod!" I cried. "For goodness'

sake, don't. You know you never do go in with me, and it might cause old Bumford to wonder."

"Then, I'll leave it till after dark to-night, Johnny. Go in then, I shall."

Bumford was astir, but not down yet. I heard him coughing, through his open casement window; for I went with a purpose round the path by his house, and called out to him. He looked out in his shirt-sleeves and a cotton nightcap.

"You see how early I am this morning. I'll bring you the key when I leave."

"Eugh!" growled Bumford. "No rights to ha' took it."

Locking the church-door securely after me, I went along the aisle, calling softly to Fred. He came forward from a dark, high-walled pew behind a pillar, where he had slept. You should have seen him devour the bread and meat, if you'd like to know what hunger means, and drink out of the bottle of beer. I sat down to practise. Had old Bumford not heard the sound of the organ, he might have come thundering at the door to know what I was about, and what the silence meant. Fred came with me, and we talked while I played. About the first question he asked was whether Gisby was dead; but I could not tell him. He said he had gone out cautiously in the night and walked about the churchyard for an hour, thinking over what he

could do. "And I really had an unpleasant adventure, Johnny," he added.

"What was it?"

"I was pacing the path under the hedge towards Bumford's, when all at once there arose the sound of voices and steps on the other side of it—fellows on the look-out for me, I suppose."

I held my breath. "What did you do?"

"Crouched down as well as I could—fortunately the hedge is high—and came softly and swiftly over the grass and the graves to the porch. I only slipped inside just in time, Johnny: before I could close the door, the men were in the churchyard. The key has a trick of creaking harshly when turned in the lock, you know; and I declare I thought they must have heard it then, for it made a fearful noise, and the night was very still!"

"And they did not hear it?"

"I suppose not. But it was some minutes, I can tell you, before my pulses calmed down to their ordinary rate of beating."

He went on to say that the only plan he could think of was to endeavour to get away from the neighbourhood, and go out of the country. To stand his trial was not to be thought of. His word, that he had not been the guilty man, had never even had a gun in his hand that night, would go for nothing, against Gisby's word and Shepherd's. Whatever came of it, he would have to be out of the church before Sunday.

The great question was : how could he get away unseen ? I told him Tod was coming with me at night, and we would consult together. Locking up the church again, and the prisoner in it, I gladdened Bumford's heart by handing over the key, and ran home to breakfast.

Life yet lingered in Gisby ; but the doctors thought he could not live through the day. The injury he had received was chiefly internal, somewhere in the region of the lungs. Fresh parties went out with fresh ardour to scour the country after Fred Westerbrook ; and so the day passed. Chancing to meet Shepherd late in the afternoon, he told me Gisby still lived.

At sundown I went in to practise again, and took a big mould-candle with me, showing it to Bumford, that he might not be uneasy on the score of his stock in the vestry. As soon as dusk came on, and before the tell-tale moon was much up, I left the organ, opened the church-door, and stood at it, according to the plan concerted with Tod. He came swiftly up with his basket of provisions, which he had got together by degrees during the day ; and then we locked the door again. After Fred had regaled himself, we consulted together. Fred was to steal out of the church about one o'clock on Sunday morning, and make off across the country. But to do this with safety it was necessary he should be disguised. By that time the ardour of the night-searching might have somewhat passed ;

and the hour, one o'clock in the morning, was as silent and lonely a one as could be expected. It was most essential that he should not be recognised by any person who might chance to meet him.

"But you must manage one thing for me," said Fred, after this was settled. "I will not go away without seeing Edna. She can come in here with you to-morrow night."

We both objected. "It will be very hazardous, Fred. Old Bumford would be sure to see her: his eyes are everywhere."

"Tell him you want her to sing over the chants with you, Johnny. Tell him anything. But, go away for an indefinite period, without first seeing her and convincing her that it is not guilt that sends me, I will not."

So there was no more to be said.

The getting provisions together seemed to have been easy, compared with what we should have to get up now—a disguise. A smock-frock, say, and the other items of a day-labourer's apparel. But it was more easy to decide than to procure them.

"Mack leaves belongings of his in the barn occasionally," said Tod to me, as we walked home together. "We'll look to-morrow night."

It was our best hope. Failing that, there would be no possibility of getting a smock-frock anywhere; and Fred would have to escape in his coat turned inside out, or something of that.

His own trousers, hitched up high, and plastered with mud at the feet, would do very well, and his own wideawake hat, pulled low down on his face. There would be no more trouble about provisions, for what Tod had taken in would be enough.

Saturday. And Tod and I with our work before us. Gisby was sinking fast.

Late in the afternoon I went to the Parsonage, wondering how I should get to see Edna Blake alone. But Fortune favoured me—as it seemed to have favoured us throughout. The children were all at play in the nearest field. Edna was in what they called the schoolroom in her lilac print dress, looking over socks and stockings, about a wheelbarrow full. I saw her through the window, and went straight in. Her large dark eyes looked as sad and big as the hole she was darning; and her voice had a hopeless ring in it.

"Oh, Johnny, how you startled me! Nay, don't apologise. It is my fault for being so nervous and foolish. I can't think what has ailed me the last few days: I seem to start at shadows. Have—have you come to tell me anything?"

By the shrinking voice and manner, I knew what she feared—that Fred Westerbrook was taken. Looking round the room, I asked whether what we said could be heard.

"There's nobody to hear," she answered. "Poor Mrs. Holland is in bed. Mr. Holland is out; and Ann is shut up, cleaning the kitchen."

"Well, then," I said, dropping my voice, "I have brought you a message from Fred Westerbrook."

Down went the socks in a heap. "Oh, Johnny!"

"Hush! No: he is not taken; he is in safe hiding. What's more, Edna, he is no more guilty than I am. He met the poachers accidentally that night just before the affray, and he never had a gun in his hands at all."

A prolonged, sobbing sigh, as if she were going to choke, and then a glad light in her eyes. She took up her work again. I went over to the seat next her, and told her all. She was darning all the while. With such a heap of mending the fingers must not be idle.

"To America!" she repeated, in answer to what I said. "What is he going to do for money to carry him thither?"

"He talks of working his passage over. He has enough money about him, he says, to take him to the coast. Unfortunately, neither Tod nor I can help him in that respect. We have brought empty pockets from school, and shall get no money before the time of going back again. Will you go in and see him, Edna?"

"Yes," she said, after a minute's consideration. "And I will bring a roll of music in my hand,

as you suggest, Johnny, for the satisfaction of Clerk Bumford's curiosity. I will be at the stile as near eight o'clock as I can, if you will come out there to meet me: but it is Saturday night, you know, when there's always a great deal to do."

The dinner was made later than usual that night at home: it had struck half-past seven before we got out, having secured another bottle of beer. The moon was rising behind the trees as we went into the barn.

Tod struck a match, and we looked about. Yes, Fortune was with us still. Hanging on the shaft of the cart, was Mack's smock-frock. It was anything but clean; but beggars can't be choosers. Next we descried a cotton neckerchief and a pair of boots; two clumsy, clodhopping boots, with nails in the thick soles, and the outside leather not to be seen for patches.

"They must do," said Tod, with a rueful look. "But just look at the wretches, Johnny. I must smuggle these and the smock-frock into the church-porch, while you go round to old B.'s for the key."

"I have the key. I flung him a shilling this morning instead of the key, saying I might be wanting to practise at any hour to-day, and would give it him back to-night."

Going by the most solitary way, I let Tod into the church, and went to meet Edna Blake. She was already there, the roll of music in her

hand. Bumford shot out of his house, and crossed our path.

"Good-evening, Mr. Bumford!" said she, cheerily. "I am come to try the hymns for to-morrow, with Johnny Ludlow."

"They'd need to be sum'at extra, they had, with all this here fuss o' practising," returned Bumford, ungraciously. "Be the parson at home, Miss Blake?"

"Yes. He is in the little room, writing."

"'Cause I want to see him," said the clerk; and he stalked off.

"Do you know how Gisby is?" Edna asked me in a whisper.

"Dead by this time, I dare say. But I have not heard."

They were at the top of the church when we got in, laughing in covert tones: I guessed it was over those dreadful boots. Edna stood by me while I locked the door, and then we went at once to the organ and began the hymn. Old Bumford could not be too far off yet to catch the sounds. Presently, Fred Westerbrook and Edna went into the aisle, and paced it arm in arm. I kept on playing; Tod, not knowing what to do with himself, whistled an accompaniment.

"How long shall I be away, Edna!" exclaimed Fred, in answer to her question. "Why, how can I tell? It may be for years; it may be for ever. I cannot come back, I

suppose, while this thing is hanging over my head."

She was in very low spirits, and the tears began to drop from her eyes. Fred could see that much, as they paced through one of the patches of moonlight.

"You may not succeed in getting away."

"No, I may not. And do you know, Edna, there are moments when I feel half inclined not to attempt it, but to give myself up instead, and let the matter take its course. If I do get away, and get on in the States, so as to make myself a home, will you come out and share it with me?"

"Yes," she answered.

"I may do it. I think I shall. Few people know more about the cultivation of land than I do, and I will take care to put my shoulder to the wheel. Practical farmers get on well there if they choose, though they have to rough it at first. Be you very sure of one thing, Edna: all my hopes and aims will be directed to the one end—that of making a home for you."

She could not speak for crying.

"It may not be a luxurious home, neither may I make anything of a position. But if I get enough for comfort, you will come out to it?"

"I will," she said with a great sob.

"My darling!"

Echo bore the words to us, softly though they

were spoken. I played a crashing chord or two, after the manner of Richards.

"You may not hear from me," continued Fred. "I must not give any clue to where I am, and therefore cannot write—at least, not at present. Men accused of murder can be fetched home from any part of the world. Only trust me, Edna. *Trust me!* though it be for years."

No fear but she would. She put a small packet in his hand.

"You *must* take it, Frederick. It is my last half year's salary—ten pounds—and I chance to have it by me: a loan, if you will; but take it you shall. Knowing that you have a few pounds to help you away and to fall back upon, will make things a little less miserable for me."

"But, Edna——"

"I declare I will throw it away if you do not take it," she returned, warmly. "Do not be cruel to me, Frederick. If you knew how it will lighten my doubts and fears, you would not for a moment hesitate."

"Be it so, Edna. It will help me onwards. Truth to say, I did not see how I should have got along, even to the coast, unless I had begged on my way. It is a loan, Edna, and I will contrive to repay it as soon as may be."

So his boast of having money to take him to the coast had been all a sham. Poor Fred! They began to take leave of one another, Edna

sobbing bitterly. I plunged into the "Hallelujah Chorus."

Tod let her out, and watched her safely across the churchyard. Then we locked the door again for the dressing-up, I playing a fugue between whiles. The first operation was that of cutting his hair short, for which we had brought the Mater's big scissors. No labourer would be likely to possess Fred's beautiful hair, or wear it so long. Tod did it well; not counting a few notches, and leaving him as good as none on his head.

It was impossible to help laughing when we took a final look at him in the rays of the moon, Fred turning himself about to be inspected: his hair, clipped nearly to the roots, suggesting a suspicion that he had just come out of prison; his trousers, not reaching to the ankle, showing off the heavy, patched, disreputable boots; the smock-frock; and Mack's spotted cotton neckerchief muffled round his chin!

"Your own mother wouldn't know you, Fred."

"What a figure I shall cut if I am dropped upon, and brought back!"

"Take heart, man!" cried Tod. "Resolve to get off, and you will get off."

"Yes, Fred, I think you will. You have been so *helped* hitherto, that I think you will be helped still."

"Thank you, Johnny. Thank you both. I

will take heart. And if I live to return, I hope I shall thank you better."

Later we dared not stay; it was past nine now. I bade Fred good-bye, and God-speed.

"Between half-past twelve and one, mind, will be your time; you'll hear the clock strike," was Tod's parting injunction, given in a whisper. "Good luck to you, old fellow! I hope and trust you'll dodge the enemy. And as soon as you are clear of the churchyard, make off as if the dickens were behind you."

"Here's the key, Mr. Bumford," I said, while Tod stole off with his bundle the other way, Fred's boots, and hair, and that. "You'll not be bothered for it next week, for I shall be off to school again."

"Thought you'd took up your lodging inside for the night," grunted Bumford. "Strikes me, Master Ludlow, it's more play nor work with you."

"As it is with a good many of us, Bumford. Good-night!"

We walked home in the moonlight, silent enough, Tod handing me the bundles to carry. The Squire attacked us, demanding whether we had stayed out to look at the moon.

And I tossed and turned on my restless bed till the morning hours, thinking of poor Fred Westerbrook, and of whether he would get away. When sleep at last came, it brought me a very vivid dream of him. I thought he did *not* get away: he was unable to unlock the

church-door. Whether Todd and I had double-locked it in leaving, I knew not; but Fred could not get it open. When Clerk Bumford entered the church in the morning, and the early comers of the congregation with him, there stood Fred, hopelessly waiting to be taken. I saw him as plainly in my dream as I had ever seen him in reality: with the dirty smock-frock, and the patched boots, and the clipped hair. Shepherd, who seemed to follow me in, darted forward and seized him; and in the confusion I awoke. Just for a minute I thought it was true—a scene actually enacted. Would it prove so?

III.

THE SYLLABUB FEAST.

"YOU have gone and done a fine thing, Master Johnny Ludlow!"

The salutation came from Clerk Bumford. He was standing at the church-door on Sunday morning, looking out as if he expected me, his face pale and stern. I had run on betimes: in fact, before the bell began.

"What have I done, Bumford?"

"Why, you just went and left this here church open last night! You never locked it up! When I come in but now, I found the door right on the latch; never as much as shut!"

Beginning to protest till all was blue that I *had* shut and locked the door—as I knew too well—caution pulled me up, and whispered me to take the blame.

"I'm sure I thought I locked it, Bumford. I never left it unlocked before, and I'll take care I never leave it so again."

"Such a thing as having the church open for a night was never heered of," he grumbled,

turning away to ring out the first peal of the bell. "Why, I might have had all my store o' candles stole!—there's nigh a pound on 'em, in here. And my black gownd—and the parson's gownd—and his surplice! Besides the grave-digging tools, and other odds and ends."

Shutting himself into his den underneath the belfry, and tugging fiercely at the cords, the bell tinkled out, warning the parish that it was time to start for morning service. The bell-ringer was a poor old man named Japhet, who was apt to be a little late. Upon which Bumford would begin the ringing, and blow Japhet up when he came.

Not a soul was yet in church. I went down the middle aisle softly calling Fred Westerbrook's name. He did not answer; and I hoped to my heart he had got clear away. The open entrance-door seemed to indicate that he had; and I thought he might have left it undone in case he had to make a bolt back again. Nevertheless, I could not shake off the remembrance of my unpleasant dream.

Of all troublesome idiots, that Bumford was the worst. When I went back, after passing by all the remote nooks and corners, Japhet had taken his place at the bell, and he was telling the parson of my sins.

"Right on the latch all the blessed night, your reverence," protested Bumford. "We might have found the whole church ransacked this morning."

Mr. Holland, a mild man, with stout legs, and cares of his own, looked at me with a half smile. "How was it, Johnny?"

"I have assured Bumford, sir, that it shall not happen again. I certainly thought I had locked it when I took him back the key. No harm has come of it."

"But harm might ha' come," persisted Bumford. "Look at all them candles in there! and the gownds and surplices! Pretty figures we should ha' cut, saving his reverence's presence, with nothing to put upon our backs this here blessed morning!"

"Talking of the key, I missed mine this morning," remarked Mr. Holland. "Have you fetched it away for any purpose, Bumford?"

"What, the tother church key!" exclaimed Bumford. "Not I, sir. I'd not be likely to fetch that key when I've got my own—and without your reverence's knowledge either!"

"Well, I cannot find it anywhere," said Mr. Holland. "It generally lies on the mantel-piece at home, and it is not there this morning."

He went into the vestry with the last words. To hear that the church key generally lay on the mantel-piece, was nothing; for the parson's house was not noticeable for order. There would have been none in it at all but for Edna.

Close upon that, arrived Shepherd, a folded paper in his hand. It contained a request that Gisby might be prayed for in the Litany.

"What, ain't he dead yet?" asked Bumford.

"No," returned Shepherd. "The doctors be afraid that internal inflammation's a-setting in now. Any way, he is rare and bad, poor man."

Next came in my set of singers, chiefly boys and girls from the parish school. But they sang better than such children generally sing; and would have sung very well indeed with an organist who had his head on his shoulders the proper way. Mrs. Todhetley had long taken pains with them, but latterly it had all been upset by Richards's crotchets.

"Now, look here," said I, gathering them before me. "We are not going to have any shrieking to-day. We sing to praise God, you know, and He is in the church with you and hears you; He is not a mile or two away, that you need shout out to be heard all that distance."

"Please, sir, Mr. Richards tells us to sing out loud: as loud as ever we can. Some on us a'most cracks our voices at it."

"Well, never mind Mr. Richards to-day. I am going to play, and I tell you to sing softly. If you don't, I shall stop the organ and let you shout by yourselves. You'll not like that. To shout and shriek in church is more irreverent than I care to talk of."

"Please, sir, Mr. Richards plays the organ so loud that we can't help it."

"I wish you'd let Mr. Richards alone. You

won't hear the organ loud to-day. Do you say your prayers when you go to bed at night?"

This question took them aback. But at last the whole lot answered that they did.

"And do you say your prayers softly, or do you shout them out at the top of your voices? To my mind, it is just as unseemly to shout when singing in church, as it would be when praying. This church has been like nothing lately but the ranters' chapel. There, take your seats, and look out the places in your prayer-books."

I watched the different groups walk into church. Our people were pretty early. Tod slipped aside as they went up the aisle to whisper me a question—Had Fred got clear away? I told him I thought so, hearing and seeing nothing to the contrary. When the parson's children came in, Mrs. Holland was with him, so that Edna Blake was enabled to join the singers, as she did when she could. But it was not often Mrs. Holland came to church. Edna had dark circles round her eyes. They looked out at mine with a painful inquiry in their depths.

"Yes, I think it is all right," I nodded in answer.

"Mr. Holland has missed his church-key," she whispered. "Coming along to church, Charley suddenly called out that he remembered hiding it in Mr. Fred Westerbrook's coat-pocket. Mrs. Holland seemed quite put out about it, and asked

me how I could possibly have allowed *him* to come into the study and sit there."

"There's old Westerbrook, Edna! Just look! His face is fiercer than usual."

Mrs. Westerbrook was with him, in a peach-coloured corded-silk gown. She made a point of dressing well. But she was just one of those women that no attire, good or bad, would set off: her face common, her figure stumpy. And so, one after another, the congregation all came in, and the service began. It caused quite a sensation when Mr. Holland made a pause, after turning to the Litany, and read out the announcement: "Your prayers are requested for Walter Gisby, who lies in dangerous extremity." Men's heads moved, and bonnets fluttered.

"How I wish you played for us always, Johnny!" cried Miss Susan Page, looking in upon me to say it, as she passed out from her pew, when the service was over.

"Why, my playing is nothing, Miss Susan!"

"Perhaps not. I don't know. But it has this effect, Johnny—it sends us home with a feeling of peace in our hearts. What with Richards's crashing and the singers' shouting, we are generally turned out in a state of irritation."

After running through the voluntary, I found a large collection of people in the churchyard. Old Westerbrook was holding forth on the subject of Fred's iniquities to a numerous audience,

the Squire making one of them. Mrs. Westerbrook looked simply malicious.

"No, I do *not* know where he is hiding," said the master of the N. D. Farm in answer to a question. "I wish I did know: I would hang him with all the pleasure in life. An ungrateful, reckless——What's that, Squire?—You'd recommend me to increase the reward? Why, I *have* increased it. I have doubled it. Old Jones has my orders to post up fresh bills."

"If all's true that's reported, he can't escape very far; he had no money in his pocket," put in young Mr. Stirling of the Court, who sometimes came over to our church. "By the way, who has been playing to-day?"

"Johnny Ludlow."

"Oh, have you, Johnny?" he said, turning to me. "It was very pleasant. And so was the singing."

"It would have been better worth your hearing had Mrs. Todhetley played—as she was to have done," I said, wishing they'd not bring me up before people, and knowing that my playing was just as simple as it could be, neither florid nor flowery."

"*I* have seen what Frederick Westerbrook was, this many a year past," broke in Mrs. Westerbrook in a loud tone, as if resenting the diverging of the conversation from Fred's ill-doings. "Mr. Westerbrook knows that I have given him my opinion again and again. Only he would not listen."

"How could I believe that my own brother's son was the scamp you and Gisby made him out to be?" testily demanded old Westerbrook, who in his way was just as unsophisticated and straightforward as the Squire: and would have been as good-natured, let alone. "I'm sure till the last year or two Fred was as steady and dutiful as heart could wish."

"You had better say he is still," said she.

"But—hang it!—I don't say it, ma'am," fired old Westerbrook. "I should be a fool to say it. Unfortunately, I *can't* say it. I have lived to find he is everything that's bad—and I say that hanging's too good for him."

Mr. Holland came out of the church and passed us, halting a moment to speak. "I am on my way to pray by poor Gisby," he said. "They have sent for me."

"Gisby must need it," whispered Tod to me. "He has been a worse sinner than Fred Westerbrook: full of hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness."

And so he had been—in regard to Fred.

"Help! Thieves!—Robbers! Help!"

The shouts came from our yard, as we were sitting down to breakfast on Monday morning, and we rushed out. There stood Mack, in the greatest state of excitement possible; his eyes lifted, his arms at work, and his breath gone. The servants ran out before we did.

"Why! what on earth's the matter, Ben Mack?" demanded the Squire. "Have you gone mad?"

"We've had thieves in the barn, sir! Thieves. All my clothes is stole."

"What clothes?"

"Them what I left in't o' Saturday night, Squire. My smock-frock and my boots, and my spotted cotton neck-handkecher. They be gone, they be."

"Nonsense!" said the Squire, while I and Tod kept our faces. "We have not had thieves here, man."

"But, 'deed, and the things be gone, Squire. Clean gone! Not so much as a shred on 'em left! Please come and see for yourself, sir."

He turned, and went across the yard with hopping strides. The Squire followed, evidently at fault for comprehension; and the rest of us after him.

"It's a mercy as the horses and the waggons bain't took!" cried Mack, plunging into the barn. "And the harness! look at it, a-hanging up; and that there wheelbarrer——"

"But what do you say *is* taken, Mack?" interrupted the Squire, cutting him short, and looking round the barn.

"All my traps, sir. My best smock-frock; and my boots, and my spotted cotton neck-handkecher. A beautiful pair o' boots, Squire, that I generally keeps here, in case I be sent off

to Alcester, or Evesham, or where not, and have to tidy myself up a bit."

Tod backed out of the barn doubled up. Nearly choking at the "beautiful" boots.

"But why do you think they are stolen, Mack?" the Squire was asking.

"I left 'em safe here o' Saturday evening, sir, when I locked up the barn. The things be all gone now; you may see as they be, Squire. There bain't a vestige of 'em."

"Have any of the men moved them?"

"'Twas me as unlocked the barn myself but now, Squire. The key on't was on the nail where I put it Saturday night. If any of the men had unlocked it afore me this morning, they'd not ha' shut it up again. We've all been away at work too on t'other side o' the land since we come on at six o'clock. No, sir, it's thieves —and what will become of me? A'most a new smock-frock, and the beautifulest pair o' strong boots: they'd ha' lasted me for years."

Tod shrieked out at last, unable to help himself. Mack cast a reproachful glance at him, as if he thought the merriment too cruel.

"You must have been drinking on Saturday, Ben Mack, and fancied you left 'em here," put in Molly, tartly.

"Me been a-drinking!" retorted poor bereaved Mack, ready to cry at the aspersion. "Why, I'd never had a drop o' nothing inside my lips since dinner-time, save a draught of skim milk as the

dairy-maid give me. They was in that far corner, they was, them boots ; and the smock-frock was laid smooth across the shaft of this here cart, the cotton neck-handkecher folded a-top on't."

"Well, well, we must inquire after the things," remarked the Squire, turning to go back to breakfast. "I don't believe they are stolen, Mack : they'll be found somewhere. If you had lost yourself, you could not have made more noise over it. I'm sure I thought the ricks must be on fire."

Tod could hardly eat his breakfast for laughing. Every now and then he came out with the most unexpected burst. The Pater demanded what there was to laugh at in Mack's having mislaid his clothes.

But, as the morning went on, the Squire changed his tone. When no trace could be discovered of the articles, high or low, he took up the opinion that we had been visited by tramps, and sent off for old Jones the constable. Jones sent back his duty, and he would come across as soon as he could, but he was busy organising the search after Master Westerbrook, and posting up the fresh bills.

"Johnny, we must dispose of that hair of Fred's in some way," Tod whispered to me in the course of the morning. "To let anybody come upon it would never do : they might fish and ferret out everything. Come along."

We went up, four stairs at a time, bolted our-

selves in his room, and undid the hair. Fine, silky hair, not quite auburn, not quite light chestnut, something between the two, but as nice a colour as you would wish to see.

"Better burn it," suggested Tod.

"Won't it make an awful smell?"

"Who cares? You can go away if you don't like the smell."

"I shall save a piece for Edna Blake."

"Rubbish, Johnny! What good will it do her?"

"She may like to have it. Especially if she never sees him again."

"Make haste, then, and take a lock. It's quite romantic. I am going to put a match to it."

I chose the longest piece I could see, put it into an envelope, and fastened it up. Tod turned the hair into his wash-hand basin, and set it alight: the grate was filled up with the summer shavings. A frizzling and fizzing set-in at once: and very soon a rare smell of singeing.

"Open the window, Johnny."

I had hardly opened it, when the handle of the door was turned and turned, and the panel thumped at. Hannah's voice came shrieking through the keyhole.

"Mr. Joseph!—Master Johnny! Are you both in there? What's the matter?"

"What should be the matter?" called back Tod, putting his hand over my mouth that I should not speak. "Go back to your nursery."

"There's something burning! My goodness!

it's just as if all the blankets in the house were singeing! You've been setting your blankets on fire, Mr. Joseph!"

"And if I have!" cried Tod, blowing away at the hair to make it burn the quicker. "They are not yours."

"Good patience! you'll burn us all up, sir! Fire—fire!" shrieked out Hannah, frightened beyond her wits. "For goodness' sake, Miss Lena, keep away from the keyhole! Here, ma'am! Ma'am! Here's Mr. Joseph with all his blankets a-fire!"

Mrs. Todhetley ran up the stairs, and her terrified appeal came to our ears through the door. Tod threw it open. The hair had burnt itself out.

"Why don't you go off for the parish engine?" demanded Tod of Hannah, as they came sniffing in. "Well, where's the fire?"

"But, my dears, something must be singeing," said Mrs. Todhetley. "Where is it?—what is it?"

"It can't be anything but the blankets," cried Hannah, choking and stifling. "Miss Lena, then, don't I tell you to keep outside, out of harm's way? Well, it is strong!"

Mrs. Todhetley put her hand on my arm. "Johnny, what is it? Where is the danger?"

"There's no danger at all," struck in Tod. "I suppose I can burn some old fishing-tackle rubbish in my basin if I please—horsehair, and that. You should not have the grates filled

with paper, ma'am, if you don't like the smell."

She went to the basin, found the smell did come from it, and then looked at us both. I was smiling, and it reassured her.

"You might have taken it to the kitchen and burnt it there, Joseph," she said mildly. "Indeed, I was very much alarmed."

"Thanks to Hannah," said Tod. "You'd have known nothing about it but for her. I wish you'd just order her to mind her own business."

"It was my business, Mr. Joseph—smelling all that frightful smell o' singeing! And if—— Why, whose boots be these?" broke off Hannah.

Opening the closet to get out the hair, we had left Fred's boots exposed. Hannah's eyes, ranging themselves around in search of the singeing, had espied them. She answered her own question.

"You must have brought them from school in your box by mistake, Mr. Joseph. These are men's boots, these are!"

"I can take them back to school again," said Tod, carelessly.

So that passed off. "And it is the best thing we can do with the boots, Johnny, as I think," he said to me in a low tone when we were once more left to ourselves. "We can't burn them. They'd make a choicer scent than the hair made."

"I suppose they'd not fit Mack?"

Tod laughed.

"If he kept those other 'beautiful boots' for high days and holidays, what would he not keep these for? No, Johnny; they are too slender for Mack's foot."

"I wonder how poor Fred likes his clumsy ones?—how he contrives to tramp it in them?"

"I would give something to know that he was clear out of the country!"

Dashing over to the Parsonage under pretence of saying good-bye to the children, I gave the envelope containing the lock of hair to Edna, telling her what it was. The red colour rushed into her face, the tears to her eyes.

"Thank you, Johnny," she said softly. "Yes, I shall like to keep it—just a little memorial of him. Most likely we shall never meet again."

"I should just take up the other side of the question, Edna, and look forward to meeting him."

"Not here, at any rate," she answered. "How could he ever come back to England with this dreadful charge hanging over him? Good luck to you this term, Johnny Ludlow. Sometimes I think our school-days are the happiest."

We were to dine in the middle of the day, and start for school at half-past two. Tod boldly asked the Squire to give him a sovereign, apart from any replenishing of his pockets that might take place at starting. He wanted it for a particular purpose, he said.

And the Pater, after holding forth a bit about thrift versus extravagance, handed out the sove-

reign. Tod betook himself to the barn. There sat Mack on the inverted wheelbarrow, at his dinner of cold bacon and bread, and looking most disconsolate.

"Found the things, Mack?"

"Me found 'em, Mr. Joseph! No, sir; and I bain't ever likely to find 'em, that's more. They are clean walked off, they are. When I thinks o' them there beautiful boots, and that there best smock-frock, I be fit to choke, I be!"

Tod was fit to choke, keeping his countenance. "What was their value, Mack?"

They were of untold val'e, sir, to me. I'd not hardly ha' lost 'em for a one-pound note."

"Would a pound replace 'em?"

Mack, drawing his knife across the bread and bacon, let it stay in the middle, and looked up. Tod spoke more plainly.

"Could you buy new ones with a pound?"

"Bless your heart, sir, and where be I to get a pound from? I was just a-calkelating how long it 'ud take me to save enough money up——"

"I wish you'd answer my question, Mack. Would a pound replace the articles that have been stolen?"

"Why, in course it would, sir," returned Mack, staring. "But where be I——"

"Don't bother. Look here: there's a pound" —tossing the sovereign to him. "Buy yourself new things, and think no more of the old ones."

Mack could not believe his eyes or ears. "Oh, Mr. Joseph! Well, I never! Sir, you be——"

"But now, understand this much, Mack. I only give you the money on one condition—that you say nothing about it. *Tell nobody.*"

"Well, I never, Mr. Joseph! A whole golden pound! Why, sir, it'll set me up reg'lar in——'

"If you don't attend to what I am saying, Mack, I'll take it away again. You are not to tell anyone that you have had it, do you hear?"

"Sir, I'll never tell a blessed soul."

"Very well. I shall expect you to keep your word. Once let it be known that your lost clothes have been replaced, and we should have the rest of the men losing theirs on speculation. So keep a silent tongue in your head; to the Squire as well as to others."

"Bless your heart, Mr. Joseph! I'll take care, sir. Nobody shan't know on't from me. When the wife wants to ferret out where I got 'em, I'll swear to her I've went in trust for 'em. And I'm sure I thank ye, sir, with all my——"

Tod walked away, cutting the thanks short.

As we were turning out at the gates on our way back to school, Tod driving Bob and Blister (which he much liked to do, though it was not always the Squire trusted him) and Giles sitting behind us, Duffham was coming along on his horse. Todd pulled up, and asked what was the latest news of Gisby.

"Well, strange to say, we are beginning to have some faint hopes of him," replied the doctor. "There's no doubt that at mid-day he was a trifle easier and better."

"That's good news," said Tod. "The man is a detestable sneak, but of course one does not want him to die. Save him if you can, Mr. Duffham—for Fred Westerbrook's sake. Good-bye."

"Good speed to you both," returned Duffham. "Take care of those horses. They are fresh."

Tod gently touched the two with the whip, and called back a saucy word. He particularly resented any reflection on his driving.

A year went by. We were at home for the Michaelmas holidays again. And who should chance to call at the Manor the very day of our arrival, but old Westerbrook.

Changes had taken place at the N. D. Farm. Have you ever observed that when our whole heart is set upon a thing, our entire aims and actions are directed to bring it about, it is all quietly frustrated by that Finger of Fate that none of us, whether prince or peasant, can resist? Mrs. Westerbrook had been doing her best to move heaven and earth to encompass the deposition of Fred Westerbrook for her own succession, and behold she could not.

Just as she had contrived that Fred should be crushed, and she herself put into old Westerbrook's will in his place, as the inheritor of the N. D. Farm and all its belongings, Heaven rendered her work nugatory by taking her to itself.

Yes, Mrs. Westerbrook was dead. She was carried off after a rather short illnesss: and Mr. Westerbrook was a widower, bereaved and solitary.

He was better off without her. The home was ten times more peaceful. He felt *that:* but he felt it to be very lonely; and he more than once caught himself wishing Fred was back again. Which of course meant wishing that he had never gone away, and never turned out to be a scamp.

Gisby did not die. Gisby had recovered in process of time, and was now more active on the farm than ever. Rather too active, its master was beginning dimly to suspect. Gisby seemed to haunt him. Gisby assumed more power than was at all needful; and Gisby never ceased to pour into Mr. Westerbrook's ear reiterations of Fred's base iniquity. Altogether, Mr. Westerbrook was growing a bit tired of Gisby. He had taken to put him down with sharp curtness; and once when Gisby ventured to hint that it might be a convenient arrangement if he took up his abode in the house, Mr. Westerbrook swore at him. As to Fred, he

was still popularly looked upon as cousin-german to the fiend incarnate.

Nothing had been heard of him. Nothing of any kind since that moonlight night when he had made his escape. Waiting for news from him so long, and waiting in vain, I, and Tod with me, had at last made up our minds that nothing more ever would be heard of him in this world. In short, that he had slipped out of it. Perhaps been starved out of it. Starved to death.

Well, Mr. Westerbrook called at the Manor within an hour of our getting home for Michaelmas, just twelve months after the uproar.

To me, he looked to be a good deal changed: his manner was quiet and subdued, almost as though he no longer took much interest in life; his hair had turned much greyer, and he complained of a continual pain in the left leg, which made him stiff, and sometimes prevented him from walking. Duffham called it a touch of rheumatism. Mr. Westerbrook fancied it might be an indication of something worse.

"But you have walked here, Westerbrook!" remarked the Squire.

"And shall walk back again—round by the village," he said. "It seems to me to be just this, Squire—that if I do not make an effort to walk while I can, I may be laid aside for good."

He gave a deep sigh as he spoke, as if he had the care of the whole parish upon him.

The Squire began talking of the crop of oats on the N. D. Farm, saying what a famous crop it was.

"You'll net a good penny by them this year, Westerbrook."

"Passable," was the indifferent reply. "Good crops no longer bring me the satisfaction they did, Squire. I've nobody to save for now. Will you spend a day with me before you go back, young gentlemen?" he went on, turning to us. "Come on Friday. It is pretty lonely there. It wants company to enliven it."

And we promised we would go.

He said good-bye, and I went with him, to help him over the stile into the lane, on account of his stiffness—for that was the road he meant to take to Church Dykely. In passing the ricks he laid his left hand on my shoulder.

"You won't mind a lonely day with a lonely old man?"

"We shall like it, sir. We will do our best to enliven you."

"It is not much that will do that now, Johnny Ludlow," said he. "When a man gets to my age, and feels his health and strength failing, it seems hard to be left all alone."

"No doubt it does, sir. I wish you had Fred back!" I boldly added.

"Hush, Johnny. Fred is lost to me for good. He made his own bed, you know, and is lying on it. As I have to lie on mine—such as it is. Such as he left to me!"

"Do you know where Fred is, sir?"

"Do I know where Fred is?" he repeated, in a tart tone. "How should I be likely to know? How *could* I know? I have never heard tidings of him, good or bad, since that wretched night."

We had gained the stile. Old Westerbrook rested his arms upon the top bar instead of getting over, tapping the step on the other side with his thick walking-stick.

"Gisby's opinion is that Fred threw himself into the first deep pond that lay in his way that night, and so put an end to his career for good," said he. "My late wife thought so, too."

"Don't you believe anything of the kind, sir," said I, in hot impulse.

"It is what Gisby is always dinning into me, Johnny. I hate to hear him. With all Fred's faults, he was not one to fly to that extremity, under——"

"I am quite sure he was not, sir. And did not."

"Under ordinary circumstances, I was about to say," went on the old gentleman, with apathy, as he put one foot on the stile. "But when a man gets the crime of murder upon his soul, there's no answering for what he may be tempted to do in his remorse and terror."

"It was not murder at all, sir. Gisby is well again."

"But it was thought to be murder at the time. Who would have given a brass button

for Gisby's life that night? Don't quibble, Master Johnny."

"Gisby was shot, sir; there's no denying that, or that he might have died of it; but I am quite sure it was not Fred who shot him."

"Tush!" said he, testily. "Help me over."

I wished I dared tell him all. Jumping across myself, I assisted him down. Not that it would have answered any end if I did tell.

"Shall I walk with you as far as the houses, sir?"

"No, thank ye, lad. I want to be independent as long as I can. Come you both over in good time on Friday. Perhaps we can get an hour or two's shooting."

Friday came, and we had rather a jolly day than not, what with shooting and feasting. Gisby drew near to join us in the cover, but his master civilly told him that he was not wanted and need not hinder his time to look after us. Never a word did old Westerbrook say that day of Fred, and he put on his best spirits to entertain us.

But in going away at night, when Tod had gone round to get the bag of partridges, which old Westerbrook insisted on our taking home, he suddenly spoke to me. We were standing at his front-door under the starlight.

"What made you say the other day that Fred was not guilty?"

"Because, sir, I feel sure he was not. I am

as sure of it as though Heaven had shown it to me."

"He was with the gang of poachers: Gisby saw him shoot," said the old man, with refuting emphasis.

"Gisby may have been mistaken. And Fred's having been with the poachers at the moment was, I think, accidental."

"Then why, if not guilty, did he go away?"

"Fear sent him. What would his word have been against Gisby's dying declaration? You remember what a hubbub there was, sir—enough to frighten any man away, however innocent he might be."

"Allowing, for argument's sake, that your theory is correct, and that he was frightened into going into hiding, why does he not come out of it? Gisby is alive and well again."

Ah, I could not speak so confidently there. "I think he must be dead, sir," I said, "and that's the truth. If he were not, some of us would surely have heard of him."

"I see," said the old gentleman, looking straight up at the stars. "We are both of the same mind, Johnny—that he is dead. I say he might have died that night: you think he went away first and died afterwards. Not much difference between us, is there?"

I thought there was a great deal; but I could not tell him why. "I wish we could hear of him, sir—and be at some certainty."

"So do I, Johnny Ludlow. He was brought up at my knee; as my own dear little child."

On our way home, Tod with the bag of game slung over his shoulder, we came upon Mr. Holland near the Parsonage, with Edna Blake and the children. They had been to Farmer Page's harvest-home. While the parson talked to Tod, Edna snatched a moment with me.

"Have you heard any news, Johnny?"

"Of *him?* Never. We can't make it out."

"Perhaps we never shall hear," she sighed. "Even if he reached the coast in safety, he may not have got over to the other side. A great many wrecks took place about that time: our weekly paper was full of them. It was the time of the equinoctial gales, and——"

"Come along, Johnny!" called out Tod at this juncture. "We must get on. Good-night, Edna: good-night, you youngsters."

The next day, Saturday, we went to Worcester, the Squire driving us, and there saw Gisby as large as life. The man had naturally great assumption of manner, and latterly he had taken to dress in the fashion. He was looming up High Street, booted and spurred, his silver-headed whip in his hand. Taking off his hat with an air, he wished the Squire a loud good-morning, as if the town belonged to him, and we were but subjects in it.

"I should think Westerbrook has never been fool enough to make his will in Gisby's favour!"

remarked the Squire, staring after him. "Egad, though, it looks like it!"

"It is to be hoped, sir, that he would make it in Fred's," was Tod's rejoinder. And the suggestion put the Pater out.

"Make it in Fred's," he retorted, going into one of his heats, and turning sharply round on the crowded pavement near the market-house, by which he came into contact with two women and their big butter-baskets. "What do you mean by that, sir? Fred Westerbrook is beyond the pale of wills, and all else. It's not respectable to name his name. He—bless the women! What on earth are these baskets at?"

They seemed to be playing at bumps with the Squire; baskets thick and threefold. Tod went in to the rescue, and got him out.

It was a strange thing. It really was. Considering that for the past day or two something or other had arisen to bring up thoughts of Fred Westerbrook, it was strange that the strangest of all things in connection with him was yet to come.

Sitting round the fire after supper, upon getting home from Worcester—it is a long drive, you know—and Tod had gone up to bed, dead tired, who should walk in but Duffham. He would not sit down, had no time; but told his business hastily. Dick Standish was dying, and had something on his conscience.

"I would have heard his confession," said

Duffham, "as I have heard that of many another dying man ; but he seems to wish to make it to a magistrate. Either to a magistrate, or to old Mr. Westerbrook, he urged. But there's no time to go up to the N. D. Farm, so I came for you, Squire."

"Bless me!" cried the Squire, starting up in a commotion—for he thought a great deal of his magisterial duties, and this was a very unusual call. "Dick Standish dying! What can he have to say? He has been nothing but a poacher all his life, poor fellow! And what has Westerbrook to do with him?"

"Well," said Duffham, in his equable way, "it strikes me that what he wants to say may affect Fred. Perhaps Standish can clear him."

"Clear Fred Westerbrook!—clear an iniquitous young man who could turn poacher and murderer! What next will you say, Duffham? Here, Johnny, get my hat and coat. Dear me! Take down a confession! I wonder whether there'll be any ink there?"

"Let me go with you, sir!" I said eagerly. "I will take my little pocket-inkstand—and some paper—and—and everything likely to be wanted. Please let me go!"

"Well, yes, you can, Johnny. Don't forget a Bible. Ten to one if *he* has one."

There were three brothers of these Standishes, Tom, Jim, and Dick, none of them particularly well-doing. Tom was no better than a

kind of tramp, reappearing in the village only by fits and starts; Jim, who had married Mary Picker, was likewise given to roving abroad, until found and brought back by the parish; Dick, as the Squire phrased it, was nothing but a poacher, and made his home mostly with Jim and Mary. The cottage—a tumble-down lodgment that they did not trouble themselves to keep in proper repair—was at our end of the parish, half a mile away, and we put our best feet foremost.

Dick lay upon the low bed in the loft. His illness had been very short and sharp; it was scarcely a week yet since he was taken with it. Duffham had done his best; but the man was dying. Jim Standish was off on one of his roving expeditions, neither the parish nor the public knowing whither.

The Squire sat by the bed, taking down the man's confession at a small table, by the light of a small candle. I and Duffham stood to hear it; Mary Standish was sent down to the kitchen. What he said cleared Fred Westerbrook—Duffham had no doubt gathered so much before he came for the Squire.

Just what Fred had told us of the events of the night, Dick Standish confirmed now. He and other poachers were out, he said, his brother Tom for one. They had bagged some game, and were about to disperse when they encountered Mr. Fred Westerbrook. He stayed talking

with them, walking the same way that they did, when lo! they all fell into the ambush planned by Gisby. A fight ensued; and he—he, Dick Standish, now speaking, conscious that he was dying—he fired his gun at them, and the shot entered Gisby. They ran away then and were not pursued; a gun was fired after them, and it struck his brother Tom, but not to hurt him very much; not to disable him. He and Tom made themselves scarce at once, before daylight; and they did not come back till danger was over, and Gisby about again. Old Jones and other folks had come turning the cottage inside out at the time in search of him (Dick), but his brother Jim swore through thick and thin that Dick had not been at home for ever so long. The Squire took all this down; and Dick signed it.

I was screwing the little inkstand up to return it to my pocket, when Mr. Holland entered, Mary Standish having sent for him. Leaving him with the sick man, we came away.

"Johnny, do you know, we might almost have made sure Fred Westerbrook was not guilty," said the Squire quite humbly, as we were crossing the turnip-field. "But why on earth did he run away? Where is he?"

"I think he must be dead, sir. What news this will be for Mr. Westerbrook!"

"Dear me, yes! I shall go to him with it in the morning."

When the morning came—which was Sunday

—the Squire was so impatient to be off that he could hardly finish his breakfast. The master of the N. D. Farm, who no longer had energy or health to keep the old early hours, was only sitting down to his breakfast when the Squire got there. In his well-meaning but hot way, he plunged into the narrative so cleverly that old Westerbrook nearly had a fit.

"Not guilty!" he stammered, when he came to himself. "Fred not guilty! Only met the poachers by accident!—was not the man that shot Gisby! Why, that's what Johnny Ludlow was trying to make me believe only a day or two ago!"

"Johnny was? Oh, he often sees through a stone wall. It's true, anyway, Westerbrook. Fred never had a gun in his hand that night."

"Then—knowing himself innocent, why on earth does he stay away?"

"Johnny thinks he must be dead," replied the Squire.

Old Westerbrook gave a groan of assent. His trembling hands upset a saucer-full of coffee on the table-cloth.

They came on to church together arm-in-arm. Mr. Holland joined them, and told the news—Dick Standish was dead: had died penitent. Penitent, so far as might be, in the very short time he had given to repentance, added the clergyman.

But the knowing that Fred was innocent

seemed to have renewed his uncle's lease of life. He was altogether a different man. The congregation felt quite electrified by some words read out by Mr. Holland before the General Thanksgiving: "Thomas Westerbrook desires to return thanks to Almighty God for a great mercy vouchsafed to him." Whispering to one another in their pews, under cover of the drooped heads, they asked what it meant, and whether Fred could have come home? The report of Dick Standish's confession had been heard before church: and Gisby and Shepherd got some hard words for having so positively laid the deed on Fred.

"I declare to goodness I thought it was Mr. Fred that fired!" said Shepherd, earnestly. "Moonlight's deceptive, in course: but I know he was close again' the gun."

Yes, he was close against the gun: Dick Standish had said that much. Mr. Fred was standing next him when he fired; Mr. Fred had tried to put out his arm to stop him, but wasn't quick enough, and called him a villain for doing it.

I was taking the organ again that day, if it concerns anybody to know it, and gave them the brightest chants and hymns the books contained. The breach with Mr. Richards had never been healed, and the church had no settled organist. Sometimes Mrs. Holland took it; sometimes Mrs. Todhetley; once it was a stranger, who

volunteered, and broke down over the blowing ; and during the holidays, if we spent them at the Manor, it was mostly turned over to me.

The Squire made old Westerbrook walk back to dine with us. Sitting over a plate of new walnuts afterwards—there was not much time for dessert on Sundays, before the afternoon service—Tod, calling upon me to confirm it, told all about Fred's hiding in the church, and how he had got away. But we did not say anything of the money given him by Edna Blake : she might not have liked it. The Squire stared with surprise, and seemed uncertain whether to praise us, or to blow us sharply up.

"Shut up in the church for three days and nights !—Nothing to eat, save what you could crib for him ! Got away at last in Mack's smock-frock and boots ! Well, you two are a pair of pretty conjurers, you are !"

"God bless 'em both for it !" cried old Westerbrook.

"But they ought to have told *me*, you know, Westerbrook. I could have managed so much better—helped the poor fellow off more effectually."

Tod gave me a kick under the table. He was nearly splitting, at hearing the Squire say this.

The first thing Mr. Westerbrook did was to insert sundry advertisements in the *Times* and other newspapers, about a hundred of them,

begging and imploring of his dear nephew (sometimes he worded it his "dear boy") to return to him. Always underneath this advertisement, wherever it appeared, was inserted another: stating that all the particulars of the poaching affray, which took place on a certain date (mentioning it), were known; that the poacher, Richard Standish, who shot Walter Gisby, had confessed the crime, and that Gisby had not died of his wounds, but recovered from them. This was done with the view of letting Fred know that he might come back with safety. But he never came. The advertisements brought forth no answer of any kind.

The Master of the N. D. Farm became very short with his bailiff as time went on. There was no reason to suppose that Gisby had intentionally accused Fred of the shot—he had really supposed it to come from Fred; but nevertheless Mr. Westerbrook took a great dislike to him, and was very short and crusty. Gisby did not like that, and they had rows perpetually. When we got home for the Christmas holidays, it was thought that Gisby would not be long on the N. D. Farm.

"Johnny, I want to tell you! I have had a letter. From *him*."

The whisper came from Edna Blake. It was Christmas Eve: and we were in the church, a lot of us, sticking the branches of holly in the

pews. The leaves had never seemed so green or the berries so red.

"Not from Fred?"

"Yes, I have. It came addressed to me about a week ago, with a ten-pound Bank of England note enclosed. There was only a line or two, just saying he had not been able to return it before, but that he hoped he was at length getting on: and that if he did get on, he should be sure to write again later. It was signed F. W. That was all. Neither his name was mentioned, nor mine, nor any address."

"Where did it come from?"

"London, I think."

"From London! Nonsense, Edna!"

"The post-mark was London. You are welcome to see the letter. I have brought it with me."

Drawing the letter from her pocket under cover of her mantle, I took it to the porch. True enough: the letter had undoubtedly been posted in London. Calling Tod, we talked a little, and then told Edna that we both thought she ought to disclose this to Mr. Westerbrook.

"I think so too," she said, "but I should not like to tell him myself——though his manner to me lately has been very kind. Will you tell him, Johnny? I will lend you the letter to show him. He will be sure to want to see it."

"And he will have to know about the gold, Edna. The loan of that night."

"Yes; it cannot be helped. I have thought it all over, and I see that there's no help for its being known now. The letter alludes to it, you perceive."

After that, the advertisements were resumed. Mr. Westerbrook put some solicitor in London to work, and they were inserted in every known paper. Also in some of the American and Australian papers. Inquiries were made after Fred in London. But nothing came of it. As to old Westerbrook, he seemed to grow better, as if the suspense stirred him up.

The months went on. Neither Fred nor news of him turned up. That he was vegetating somewhere beyond the pale of civilisation, or else was at length really dead, appeared to be conclusive.

July. And we boys at home again for the holidays. The first news told us was, that Mr. Westerbrook and his bailiff had parted company. Gisby had said farewell to the N. D. Farm.

In the satisfaction of finding himself sole master, which he had not been for many a year, and to celebrate Gisby's departure, Mr. Westerbrook gave a syllabub feast, inviting to it old and young, grown people and children. Syllabub feasts were tolerably common with us.

It was an intensely hot day; the lawn was dotted with the guests; most of them gathered

in groups under the trees in the shade. Old Westerbrook, the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley, Parson and Mrs. Holland and Mr. Brandon were together under the great horse-chestnut tree. Edna Blake, of course, had the trouble of the parson's children, and I was talking with her. Little tables with bowls of syllabub on them and cakes and fruit stood about: by-and-by, at sunset or so, we were to go in to a high tea.

It was getting on for two years since the night of Fred Westerbrook's departure; and Edna was looking five times two years older. Worn and patient were the lines of her face. She was dressed rather poorly, as usual. She had never dressed much otherwise: but since that unlucky night her clothes had been made to last as I should think nobody else's clothes ever lasted. Whether that ten pounds had absorbed all her funds (as it most likely had), or whether Edna had been saving up for that visionary, possible voyage to America and the home with Fred that was to follow it, I knew not, but one never saw her in new things now. To-day she wore a muslin that once had rose-red spots on it, but the repeated washings had diluted them to a pale pink; and the pink ribbons on her hat had faded too. Not but that, despite all, she looked a lady.

"Have you the headache, Edna?"

"Just a little," she answered, holding her

hand to her head. "Charley and Tom would race about as we came along, and I had to run after them. To be much under a blazing sun often gives me the headache now."

I wondered to myself why the parson and his wife could not have ordered Charley and Tom to be still. Fathers and mothers never think their children can tire people.

"I want some more syllabub, Edna," cried Charley just then.

"And me too," put in little Miles Stirling.

She got up patiently; ladled some of the stuff into two of the custard cups, and gave one to each of the children, folding her handkerchief under little Stirling's chin to guard his velvet dress. They stood at the table, two eager little cormorants, taking it in with their tea-spoons.

At that moment, the gate behind us opened, and a gentleman came in. We turned round to see who was arriving so late. A stranger. Some good-looking fellow with auburn hair, a beard that glimmered like soft silk in the sun, and a bronzed face. To judge by his movements, he was struck with surprise at sight of the gay company, and stood in evident hesitation.

"Oh, Johnny!"

The low, half-terrified exclamation came from Edna. I turned to her. Her eyes were strained on the stranger; her face had turned white as death. He saw us then and came towards us. We were the nearest to him.

"Do you know me, Edna?"

I knew him then: knew his voice. Ay, and himself also, now that I saw him distinctly. Edna did not faint; though she was white enough for it: she only put her hands together as one does in prayer, a joyous thankfulness dawning in her eyes.

"Frederick?"

"Yes, my darling. How strange that you should be the first to greet me! And *you*, Johnny, old fellow! You *have* grown."

His two hands lay for a time in mine and Edna's. Nobody had observed him yet: we were at the end of the lawn, well under the trees.

"More syllabub, Edna!" shrieked out that greedy young Charley.

"And me want more, too," added little Miles; "me not had enough."

Edna drew her hand away to go to the table, a happy light shining through her tears. Fred put his arm within mine, and we went across the grass together.

The first to see him was Mr. Brandon. He took in the situation at once, and in a degree prepared Mr. Westerbrook. "Here's some bronzed young man coming up, Westerbrook," said he. "Looks like a traveller. I should not be surprised if it is your nephew; or perhaps one who brings news of him."

Old Westerbrook fell back in his chair, as Fred stood there with his two hands stretched

out to him. Then he sprang up, burst into tears, and clasped Fred in his arms. Of all commotions!— Mr. Brandon walked away out of it into the sun, putting his yellow silk handkerchief on his head. The Squire stared as if he had never seen a bronzed man before; Tod came leaping up, and the best part of the company after him.

"Edna, Edna!" called out Mr. Westerbrook, sitting back in his chair again, and holding Fred tightly. "Edna, I want you instantly."

She advanced modestly, blushing lilies and roses, her hat held in her hand by its faded strings. Mr. Westerbrook looked at her through his tears.

"Here he is, my dear—do you see?—come back to us at last. We must both welcome him. The homestead is yours from this day, Fred; I will have but just a corner in it. I am too old now for a busy life: you must be the acting master. And Edna, my child, you will come here to be his helpmeet in it, and to take care of me in my declining years—my dear little daughter! Thank God for all things!"

Fred gave us just a brief summary of the past. Getting over to America without much difficulty, he had sought there for some remunerative work, and sought in vain. One of those panics that the Americans go in for had recently occurred in the States, and numbers of men were unable to get employment. After sundry ad-

ventures, and some semi-starvation, he at length made his way to the West Indies. A cousin of his late mother was, he knew, settled somewhere within the regions of British Guiana. He found him in Berbice, a small merchant of New Amsterdam. To him Fred told his whole story; and the old cousin gave him a berth in his counting-house. Office work was new to Fred; but he did his best; and with the first proceeds of his pay he enclosed the ten pounds to Edna; the house forwarding the letter to their agents in London, to be posted from thence. Some months later, he chanced to see the advertisement for him in an English newspaper. As soon as he was able, he came off to answer it in person; and—here he was.

"All's well that ends well," remarked Mr. Brandon, in his dry way.

"And don't you go fraternising with poachers again, Mr. Fred!" cried out the Squire. "See what it brought you to the last time."

"No, Squire; never again," answered Fred, pushing back his auburn hair (very long again) with a smile. "This one time has been quite enough."

"But you cannot have Edna, you know," said Mrs. Holland to him, with a disturbed face. "The Parsonage could not possibly get on without her."

"I am afraid the Parsonage will have to try to, Mrs. Holland."

"I shall be obliged to keep my bed; that will be the end of it," said Mrs. Holland, gloomily. "Nobody *can* manage the children but Edna. When she is otherwise occupied, their noise is frightful: ten times more distracting than the worst toothache."

Fred said nothing further; she was looking so ruefully wobegone. Putting his arm into mine, he turned into a shady walk.

"Will you be my groomsman at the wedding, Johnny? But for you, my good friend, I don't know that I should have been saved to see this day."

"Nay, Fred, I think it was the key of the church that saved you. I will be your groomsman if you really and truly prefer to pitch upon me, rather than on somebody older and better."

"Yes, you are right," he answered, lifting his hat, and glancing upwards. "It was the key of the church—under God."

IV.

SEEN IN THE MOONLIGHT.

"I TELL you it is," repeated Tod. "One cannot mistake Temple, even at a distance."

"But this man looks so much older than he. And he has whiskers. Temple had none."

"And has not Temple got older, do you suppose; and don't whiskers sprout and grow? You are always a muff, Johnny. That is Slingsby Temple."

We had gone by rail to Whitney Hall, and were walking up from the station. The Squire sent us to ask after Sir John's gout. It was a broiling hot day in the middle of summer. On the lawn before the house, with some of the Whitneys, stood a stranger; a little man, young, dark, and upright.

Tod was right, and I wrong. It was Slingsby Temple. But I thought him much altered: older-looking than his years, which numbered close upon twenty-five, and more sedate and haughty than ever. We had neither seen nor heard of him since quitting Oxford.

"Oh, he's regularly in for it this time," said Bill Whitney, in answer to inquiries about his father, as they shook hands with us. "He has hardly ever had such a bout; can only lie in bed and groan. Temple, don't you remember Todhetley and Johnny Ludlow?"

"Yes, I do," answered Temple, holding out his hand to me first, and passing by Tod to do it. But that was Slingsby Temple's way. I was of no account, and therefore it did not touch his pride to notice me.

"I am glad to see you again," he said to Tod, cordially enough, as he turned to him; which was quite a gracious acknowledgment for Temple.

But it surprised us to see him there. The Whitneys had no acquaintance with the Temples; neither had he and Bill been particular friends at college. Whitney explained it after luncheon, when we were sitting outside the windows in the shade, and Temple was pacing the shrubbery with Helen.

"I fancy it's a gone case," said Bill, nodding towards them.

"Oh, William, you should not say it," struck in Anna, in a tone of remonstrance, and with her pretty blush. "It is not sure—and not right to Mr. Temple."

"Not say it to Tod and Johnny! Rubbish! Why, they are like ourselves, Anna. I say I think it is going to be a case."

"Helen with another beau!" cried free Tod. "How has it all come about?"

"The mother and Helen have been staying at Malvern, you know," said Whitney. "Temple turned up at the same hotel, the Foley Arms, and they struck up an intimacy. I went over for the last week, and was surprised to see how thick he was with them. The mother, who is more unsuspicious than a goose, told Temple, in her hospitable way, when they were saying good-bye, that she should be glad to see him if ever he found himself in these benighted parts: and I'll be shot if at the end of five days he was not here! If Helen's not the magnet, I don't know what else it can be."

"He appears to like her; but it may be only a temporary fancy that will pass away; it ought not to be talked of," reiterated Anna. "It may come to nothing."

"It may, or may not," persisted Bill.

"Will she consent to have him?" I asked.

"She'd be simple if she didn't," said Bill. "Temple would be a jolly fine match for any girl. Good in all ways. His property is large, and he himself is as sober and steady as any parson. Always has been."

I was not thinking of Temple's eligibility: that was undeniable; but of Helen's inclinations. Some time before she had gone in for a love affair, which would not do at any price, caused some stir at the Hall, and came to signal

grief: though I have not time to tell of it here. Whitney caught the drift of my thoughts.

"*That's* over and done with, Johnny. She'd never let its recollection spoil other prospects. You may trust Helen Whitney for that. She is as shallow-hearted as——"

"For shame, William!" remonstrated Anna.

"It's true," said he. "I didn't say *you* were. Helen would have twenty sweethearts to your one, and think nothing of it."

Tod looked at Anna, and laughed gently. Her cheeks turned the colour of the rose she was holding.

"What's this about a boating tour?" he inquired of Whitney. It had been alluded to at lunch-time.

"Temple's going in for one with some more fellows," was the reply. "He has asked me to join them. We mean to do some of the larger rivers; take our tent, and encamp on the banks at night."

"What a jolly spree!' cried Tod, his face flushing with delight. "How I should like it!"

"I wish to goodness you were coming. But Temple has made up his party. It is his affair, you know. He talks of staying out a month."

"One gets no chance in this slow place," cried Tod, fiercely. "I'll emigrate, I think, and go tiger-hunting. Is it a secret, this boating affair?"

"A secret! No."

"What made you kick me under the table,

then, when I would have asked particulars at luncheon ?"

"Because the mother was present. She has taken all sorts of queer notions into her head—mothers always have such—that the boat will be found bottom upwards some day, and we under it. Failing that, we are to catch colds and fevers and agues from the night encampments. So we say as little about it as possible before her."

"I see," nodded Tod. "Look here, Bill, I should like to get up a boating party myself: it sounds glorious. How do you set about it ?—and where can you get a boat ?"

"Temple knows," said Bill, "I don't. Let us go and ask him."

They went across the grass, leaving me alone with Anna. She and I were the best of friends, as the reader may remember, and exchanged many a little confidence with one another that the world knew nothing of.

"Should you like it for Helen ?" I asked, indicating her sister and Slingsby Temple.

"Yes, I think I should," she answered. "But William was not warranted in speaking as he did. Mr. Temple will only be here a few days longer: when he leaves, we may never see him again."

"But he is evidently taken with Helen. He shows that he is. And when a man of Slingsby Temple's disposition allows himself to betray

anything of the kind, rely upon it he means something."

"Did you like him at Oxford, Johnny?"

"Well—I did and did not," was my hesitating answer. "He was reserved, close, proud, and unsociable; and no man displaying those qualities can be much liked. On the other hand, he was of exemplary conduct, deserving respect from all, and receiving it."

'I think he is religious," said Anna, her voice taking a lower tone.

"Yes, I always thought him that. I fancy their mother brought them up to be so. But Temple is the last man in the world to display it."

"What with papa's taking up two rooms to himself now he has the gout, and all of us being at home, mamma was a little at fault what chamber to give Mr. Temple. There was no time for much arrangement, for he came without notice; so she just turned Harry out of his room, which used to be poor John's, you know, and put Mr. Temple there. That night Harry chanced to go up to bed later than the rest of us. He forgot his room had been changed, and went straight into his own. Mr. Temple was kneeling down in prayer, and a Bible lay open on the table. Mamma says it is not all young men who say their prayers and read the Bible nowadays."

"Not by a good many, Anna. Yes, Temple is good, and I hope Helen will get him. She

will have position, too, as his wife, and a large income."

"He comes into his estate this year, he told us; in September. He will be five-and-twenty then. But, Johnny, I don't like one thing: William says there was a report at Oxford that the Temples never live to be even middle-aged men."

"Some of them have died young, I believe. But, Anna, that's no reason why they all should."

"And—there's a superstition attaching to the family, is there not?" continued Anna. "A ghost that appears; or something of that?"

I hardly knew what to answer. How vividly the words brought back poor Fred Temple's communication to me on the subject, and his subsequent death.

"You don't speak," said she. "Won't you tell me what it is?"

"It is this, Anna: but I dare say it's all nonsense—fancy. When one of the Temples is going to die, the spirit of the head of the family who last died is said to appear and beckon to him; a warning that his own death is near. Down in their neighbourhood people call it the Temple superstition."

"I don't quite understand," cried Anna, looking earnestly at me. "*Who* is it that is said to appear?"

"I'll give you an instance. When the late Mr. Temple, Slingsby's father, was walking

home from shooting with his gamekeeper one September day, he thought he saw his father in the wood at a little distance: that is, his father's spirit, for he had been dead some years. It scared him very much at the moment, as the keeper testified. Well, Anna, in a day or two he, Mr. Temple, was dead—killed by an accident."

"I am glad I am not a Temple; I should be always fearing I might see the sight," observed Anna, a sad, thoughtful look on her gentle face.

"Oh no, you'd not, Anna. The Temples themselves don't think of it, and don't believe in it. Slingsby does not, at any rate. His brother Fred told me at Oxford that nobody must presume to allude to it in Slingsby's presence."

"Fred? He died at Oxford, did he not?"

"Yes, he died there, poor fellow. Thrown from his horse. I saw it happen, Anna."

But I said nothing to her of that curious scene to which I had been a witness a night or two before the accident—when poor Fred, to Slingsby's intense indignation, fancied he saw his father on the college staircase; fancied his father beckoned to him. It was not a thing to talk of. After that time Slingsby had seemed to regard me with a rather special favour; I wondered whether it was because I had *not* talked of it.

The afternoon passed. We went up to see Sir John in his gouty room, and then said goodbye to them all, including Temple, and started for home again. Tod was surly and cross. He

had come out in a temper and he was going back in one.

Tod liked his own way. Nobody in the world resented interference more than he: and just now he and the Squire were at war. Some twelve months before, Tod had dropped into a five-hundred pound legacy from a distant relative. It was now ready to be paid to him. The Squire wished it paid over to himself, that he might take care of it; Tod wanted to be grand, and open a banking account of his own. For the past two days the argument had held out on both sides, and this morning Tod had lost his temper. Lost it was again now, but on another score.

"Slingsby Temple might as well have invited me to join the boating lot!" he broke out to me, as we drew near home. "He knows I am an old hand."

"But if his party is made up, Tod? Whitney said it was."

"Rubbish to you, Johnny. Made up! They could as well make room for another. And much good some of them are, I dare say! I can't remember that Slingsby ever took an oar in his hand at Oxford. All he went in for was star-gazing—and chapels—and lectures. And look at Bill Whitney! He hates rowing."

"Did you tell Temple you would like to join?"

"He could see it. I didn't say in so many words, Will you let me? Of all things, I should

enjoy a boating tour! It would be the most jolly thing on earth."

That night, after we got in, the subject of the money grievance cropped up again. The Squire was smoking his long churchwarden pipe at the open window; Mrs. Todhetley sat by the centre table and the lamp, hemming a strip of muslin. Tod, open as the day on all subjects, abused Temple's "churlishness" for not inviting him to make one of the boating party, and declared he'd organise one of his own, which he could readily do, now he was not tied for money. That remark set the Squire on.

"Aye, that's just where it would be, Joe," said he. "Let you keep the money in your own fingers, and we should soon see what it would end in."

"What would it end in?" demanded Tod.

"Ducks and drakes."

Tod tossed his head. "You think I am a child still, I believe, father."

"You are no better where the spending of money's concerned," said the Squire, taking a long whiff. "Few young men are. Their fathers know that, and keep it from them as long as they can. And that's why so many are not let come into possession of their estates before they are five-and-twenty. This young Temple, it seems, does not come into his; Johnny, here, does not."

"I should like to know what more harm it would do for the money to lie in my name in

the Old Bank than if it lay in yours ?" argued Tod. "Should I be drawing cheques on purpose to get rid of it ? That's what you seem to suppose, father."

"You'd be drawing them to spend," said the Pater.

"No, I shouldn't. It's my own money, after all. Being my own, I should take good care of it."

Old Thomas came in with some glasses, and the argument dropped. Tod began again as we were going upstairs together.

"You see, Johnny," he said, stepping inside my room on his way, and shutting the door for fear of eavesdroppers, "there's that hundred pounds I owe Brandon. The old fellow has been very good, never so much as hinting that he remembers it, and I shall pay him back the first thing. To do this, I must have exclusive possession of the money. A fine bobbery the Pater would make if he got to know of it. Besides, a man come to my age likes to have a banking account—if he can. Good-night, lad."

Tod carried his point. He turned so restive and obstinate over it as to surprise and vex the Squire, who of course knew nothing about the long-standing debt to Mr. Brandon. The Squire had no legal power to keep the money, if Tod insisted upon having it. And he did insist. The Squire put it down to boyish folly, self-assumption ; and groaned and grumbled all the way to Worcester, when Tod was taking

the five-hundred pound cheque, paid to him free of duty, to the Old Bank.

"We shall have youngsters in their teens wanting to open a banking account next!" said the Pater to Mr. Isaac, as Tod was writing his signature in the book. "The world's coming to something."

"I dare say young Mr. Todhetley will be prudent, and not squander it," observed Mr. Isaac, with one of his pleasant smiles.

"Oh, will he, though! You'll see. Look here," went on the Squire, tapping the banker on the arm, "couldn't you, if he draws too large a cheque at any time, refuse to cash it?"

"I fear we could not do that," laughed Mr. Isaac. "So long as he does not overdraw his account, we are bound to honour his cheques."

"And if you do overdraw it, Joe, I hope the bank will prosecute you!—I would, I know," was the Squire's last threat, as we left the bank and turned towards the Cross, Tod with a cheque-book in his breast-pocket.

But Mr. Brandon could not be paid then. On going over to his house a day or two afterwards, we found him from home. The housekeeper thought he was on his way to one of the "water-cure establishments," in Yorkshire, she said, but he had not yet written to give his address.

"So it must wait," remarked Tod to me as we went home. "I'm not sorry. How the bank

would have stared at having to pay a hundred pounds down on the nail! Conclude, no doubt, that I was going to the deuce headlong."

"By Jove!" cried Tod, taking a leap in the air.

About a week had elapsed since the journey to the Old Bank, and Tod was opening a letter that had come addressed to him by the morning post.

"Johnny! will you believe it, lad? Temple asks me to be of the boating lot, after all."

It was even so. The letter was from Slingsby Temple, written from Templemore. It stated that he had been disappointed by some of those who were to have made up the number, and if Todhetley and Ludlow would supply their places, he should be glad.

Tod turned wild. You might have thought, as Mrs. Todhetley remarked, that he had been invited to Eden.

"The idea of Temple's asking you, Johnny!" he said. "You are of no good in a boat."

"Perhaps I had better decline?"

"No, don't do that, Johnny. It might upset the party altogether, perhaps. You must do your best."

"I have no boating suit."

"I will treat you to one," said Tod, munifi-

cently. "We'll get it at Evesham. Pity but my things would fit you."

So it was, for he had loads of them.

The Squire, for a wonder, did not oppose the scheme. Mrs. Todhetley (like Lady Whitney) did, in her mild way. As Bill said, all mothers were alike—always foreseeing danger. And though she was not Tod's true mother, or mine either, she was just as anxious for us; and she looked upon it as nearly certain that one of us would come home drowned, and the other with the ague.

"They won't sleep on the bare ground, of course," said Duffham, who chanced to call that morning, while Tod was writing his letter of acceptance to Slingsby Temple.

"Of course we shall," fired Tod, resenting the remark. "What harm could it do us?"

"Give some of you rheumatic fever," said Duffham.

"Then why doesn't it give it to the gipsies?" retorted Tod.

"The gipsies are used to it—born to it, as one may say. You young men must have a waterproof sheet to lie upon, or a tarpaulin, or something of the sort."

Tod tossed his head, disdaining an answer, and wrote on.

"You will have plenty of rugs and great-coats with you, of course," went on Duffham. "And I'll give you a packet of quinine powders. It

is as well to be prepared for contingencies. If you find any symptoms of unusual cold, or shivering, just take one or two of them."

"Look here, Mr. Duffham," said Tod, dashing his pen on the table. "Don't you think you had better attend us yourself with a medicine chest? Put up a cargo of rhubarb—and magnesia—and castor oil—and family pills. A few quarts of senna-tea might not come in amiss. My patience! I believe you take us to be delicate infants."

"And I should recommend you to carry a small keg of whisky amid the boat stores," continued Duffham, not in the least put out. "You'll want it. Take a nip of it neat when you first get up from the ground in the morning. It is necessary you should, and will ward off some evils that might otherwise arise. Johnny Ludlow, I'll put the quinine into your charge: mind you don't forget it."

"Of all old women!" muttered Tod to me. "Had the Pater been in the room, this might have set him against our going."

On the following day we went over to Whitney Hall, intending to take Evesham on our way back, and buy what was wanted. Surprise the first. Bill Whitney was not at home, and was not to be of the boating party.

"You never saw anybody in such a way in your life," cried Helen, who could devote some time to us, now Temple was gone. "I must

say it was too bad of papa. He never made any objection while Mr. Temple was here, but let poor William anticipate all the pleasure; and then he went and turned round afterwards."

"Did he get afraid for him?" cried Tod in wonder. "I'd not have thought it of Sir John."

"Afraid! no," returned Helen, opening her eyes. "What he got was a fit of the gout. A relapse."

"What has the gout to do with Bill?"

"Why, old Featherston ordered papa to Buxton, and papa said he could not do without William to see to him there: mamma was laid up in bed with one of her bad colds—and she is not out of it yet. So papa went off, taking William—and you should just see how savage he was."

For William Whitney to be "savage" was something new. He had about the easiest temper in the world. I laughed, and said so.

"Savage for him, I mean," corrected Helen, who was given to random speech. "Nothing puts him out. Some cross fellows would not have consented, and have told their fathers so to their faces. It is a shame."

"I don't suppose Bill cares much; he is no hand at rowing," remarked Tod. "Did he write to Temple and decline?"

"Of course he did," was Helen's resentfully spoken answer; and she seemed, to say the

least, quite as much put out as Bill could have been. "What else could he do?"

"Well, I am sorry for this," said Tod. "Temple has asked me now. Johnny also."

"Has he!" exclaimed Helen, her eyes sparkling. "I hope you will go."

"Of course we shall go," said Tod. "Where's Anna?"

"Anna? Oh, sitting up with mamma. She likes a sick-room: I don't."

"You'd like a boat better—if Temple were in it," remarked Tod, with a saucy laugh.

"Just you be quiet," retorted Helen.

From Whitney Hall we went to Evesham, and hastily procured what we wanted. The next day but one was that fixed for our departure, and when it at last dawned, bright and hot, we started amidst the good wishes of all the house, Tod with a fishing-rod and line, in case the expedition should afford an opportunity for fishing, and I with Duffham's quinine powders in my pocket.

Templemore, the seat of the Temples, was on the Welsh borders. We were not going there, but to a place called Sanbury, which lay within a few miles of the mansion. Slingsby Temple and his brother Rupert were already there, with the boat and the tent and all the rest of the apparatus, making ready for our departure on the morrow. Our head-quarters, until the start, was at the Ship, a good, old-

fashioned inn, and we found that we were expected to be Temple's guests there.

"I would have asked you to Templemore to dine and sleep," he observed, in a cordial tone, "and my mother said she should have been pleased to see you; but to get down here in the morning would have been inconvenient. At least, it would take up the time that ought to be devoted to getting away. Will you come and see the boat?"

It was lying in a locked-up shed near the river. A tub-pair, large of its kind. Three of them were enough for it: and I saw that, in point of fact, I was not wanted for the working; but Temple either did not like to ask Tod without me, or else would not leave me out. The Temples might have more than their share of pride, but it was accompanied by an equal share of refined and considerate feeling.

"We shall make you useful, never fear," said he to me, with a smile. "And it will be capital boating experience for you."

"I am sure I shall like it," I answered. And I liked him better than I ever had in my life.

Numerous articles were lying ready with the boat. Temple seemed to have thought of every needful thing. A pot to boil water in, a pan for frying, a saucepan for potatoes, a mop and towing-rope, stone jugs for beer, milk, and fresh water, tins to hold our grog, and the like. Amid the stores were tea, sugar, candles, cheese, butter, a

cooked ham, some tinned provisions, a big jar of beer, and (Duffham should have seen it) a two-gallon keg of whisky.

"A doctor up with us said we ought to have whisky," remarked Tod. "He is nothing but an old woman. He put some quinine powders in Johnny's pocket, and talked of a waterproof sheet to lie upon."

"Quite right," said Temple. "There it lies."

And there it did lie, wrapped round the folded tent. A large waterproof tarpaulin to cover the ground, at night, and keep the damp from our limbs.

"Did you ever make a boating tour before, Temple?" asked Tod.

"Oh yes. I like it. I don't know any pleasure equal to that of encamping out at night on a huge plain, where you may study all the stars in the heavens."

As Temple spoke, he glanced towards a small parcel in a corner. I guessed it was one of his night telescopes.

"Yes, it is," he assented; "but only a small one. The boat won't stretch, and we can only load it according to its limits."

Rupert Temple came up as we were leaving the shed. I had never seen him before. He was the only brother left, and Slingsby's presumptive heir. Why, I know not, but I had pictured Rupert as being like poor Fred—tall, fair, bright-looking as a man can be. But there

existed not a grain of resemblance. Rupert was just a second edition of Slingsby: little, dark, plain, and proud. It was not an offensive pride —quite the contrary: and with those they knew well they were cordial and free.

Those originally invited by Temple were his cousin Arthur Slingsby, Lord Cracroft's son; Whitney; and a young Welshman named Pryce-Hughes. All had accepted, and intended to keep the engagement, knowing then of nothing to prevent them. But, curious to say, each one in succession wrote to decline it later. Whitney had to go elsewhere with his father; Pryce-Hughes hurt his arm, which disabled him from rowing; and Arthur Slingsby went off without ceremony in somebody's yacht to Malta. As the last of the letters came, which was Whitney's, Mrs. Temple seemed struck with the coincidence of all refusing, or compelled to refuse. "Slingsby, my dear," she said to her son, "it looks just as though you were not to go." "But I will go," answered Temple, who did not like to be baulked in a project, more than anybody else likes it; "if these can't come, I'll get others who can." And he forthwith told his brother Rupert that there'd be room for him in the boat —he had refused him before; and wrote to Tod. After that, came another letter from Pryce-Hughes, saying his arm was better, and he could join the party at Bridgenorth or Bewdley. But it was too late: the boat was filled. Temple

meant to do the Severn, the Wye, and the Avon, with a forced interlude of canals, and to be out a month, taking it easily, and resting on Sundays.

"Catch Slingsby missing Sunday service if he can help it!" said Rupert, aside to me.

We started in our flannel suits and red caps, and started well, but not until the afternoon, Temple steering, his brother and Tod taking the sculls. The water was very shallow; and by-and-by we ran aground. The stern of the boat swung round, and away went our tarpaulin; and it was carried off by the current before we could save it.

Well, that first afternoon there were difficulties to contend with, and one or other of the three was often in the water; but we made altogether some five or six miles. It was the hottest day I ever felt; and about seven o'clock, on coming to a convenient meadow nearly level with the river, none of us were sorry to step ashore. Making fast the boat for the night, we landed the tent and other things, and looked about us. A coppice bounded the field on the left; right across, in a second field, stood a substantial farm-house, surrounded by its barns and ricks. Temple produced one of his cards, which was to be taken to the house, and the farmer's leave asked to encamp on the meadow. Rupert Temple and Tod made themselves decent to go on the errand.

"We shall want a bundle or two of straw,"

said Temple; "it won't do to lie on the bare ground. And some milk. You must ask if they will accommodate us, and pay what they charge."

They went off, carrying also the jar to beg for fresh water. Temple and I began to unfurl the tent, and to busy ourselves amid the things generally.

"Halloa! what's to do here?"

We turned, and saw a stout, comely man, in white shirt-sleeves, an open waistcoat, knee-breeches, and top-boots; no doubt the farmer himself. Temple explained. He and some friends were on a boating tour, and had landed there to encamp for the night.

"But who gave you leave to do it?" asked the farmer. "You are trespassing. This is my ground."

"I supposed it might be necessary to ask leave," said Temple, haughtily courteous; "and I have sent to yonder house—which I presume is yours—to solicit it. If you will kindly accord the permission, I shall feel obliged."

That Temple looked disreputable enough, there could be no denying. No shoes on, no stockings, trousers tucked up above the knee: for he had been several times in the water, and, as yet, had done nothing to himself. But two of our college-caps chanced to be lying exposed on the boat: and perhaps Temple's tone and address had made their due impression. The

farmer looked hard at him, as if trying to remember his face.

"It's not one of the young Mr. Temples, is it?" said he. "Of Templemore."

"I am Mr. Temple, of Templemore. I have sent my card to your house."

"Dash me!" cried the farmer, heartily. "Shake hands, sir. I fancied I knew the face. I've seen you out shooting, sir—and at Sanbury. I knew your father. I'm sure you are more than welcome to camp alongside here, and to any other accommodation I can give you. Will you shake hands, young gentleman?" giving his hand to me as he released Temple's.

"My brother and another of our party are gone to your house to beg some fresh water and buy some milk," said Temple, who did not seem at all to resent the farmer's familiarity, but rather to like it. "And we shall be glad of a truss or two of fresh straw, if you can either sell it to us or give it. We have had the misfortune to lose our waterproof-sheet."

"Sell be hanged!" cried the farmer, with a jovial laugh. "Sell ye a truss or two o' straw! Sell ye milk! Not if I know it, Mr. Temple. Ye be welcome, sir, to as much as ever ye want of both. One of my men shall bring the straw down."

"You are very good."

"And anything else ye please to think of. Don't scruple to ask, sir. Will you all come and

sup at my house? We've got a rare round o' beef in cut, and I saw the missis making pigeon-pies this morning."

But Temple declined the invitation most decisively; and the farmer, perhaps noting that, did not press it. It was rare weather for the water, he observed.

"We could do with less heat," replied Temple.

"Ay," said the farmer, "I never felt it worse. "But it's good for the corn."

And, with that, he left us. The other two came back with water and oceans of milk. Sticks were soon gathered from the coppice, and the fire made; the round pot, filled with water, was put on to boil for tea, and the tent was set up.

Often and often in my later life have I looked back to that evening. The meal over—and a jolly good one we made—we sat round the camp fire, then smouldering down to red embers, and watched the setting sun, Rupert Temple and Tod smoking. It was a glorious sunset, the west lighted up with gold and purple and crimson; the sky above us clear and dark-blue.

But oh, how hot it was! The moon came up as the sun went down, and the one, to our fancy, seemed to give out as much heat as the other. There we sat on, sipping our grog, and talking in the bright moonlight, Temple with his elbows on the grass, his face turned up towards the sky and the few stars that came out. The colours

in the west gave place to a beautiful opal, stretching northwards.

It was singular—I shall always think so—that the conversation should turn on MacRae, the Scotchman who used to make our skin creep at Oxford with his tales of second-sight. We were *not* talking of Oxford, and I don't know how MacRae came up. Temple had been talking of astronomy; from that we got to astrology; so perhaps it was in that way. Up he came, however, he and his weird believings; and Rupert Temple, who had not enjoyed the honour of Mac's acquaintance, and had probably never heard his name before, got me to relate one or two of Mac's choice experiences.

"Was the man a fool?" asked Rupert.

"Not a bit of it."

"I'm sure I should say so. Making out that he could foresee people's funerals before they were dead, or likely to die."

"Poor Fred was three-parts of a believer in them," put in Temple, in a dreamy voice, as though his thoughts were buried in that past time.

"Fred was!" exclaimed Rupert, taking his brother sharply up. "Believer in what?"

"MacRae's superstitions."

"Nonsense, Slingsby!"

Temple made no rejoinder. In his eye, which chanced to catch mine at the moment, there sat a singular expression. I wondered

whether he was recalling that other superstition of Fred's, that little episode a night or two before he died.

"We had better be turning in," said Temple, getting up. "It won't do to sit here too long; and we must be up betimes in the morning."

So we got to bed at last—if you can call it bed. The farmer's good straw was strewed thickly underneath us in the tent; we had our rugs; and the tent was fastened back at the entrance to admit air. But there was no air to admit, not a whiff of it; nothing came in but the moonlight. None of us remembered a lighter night, or a hotter one. I and Tod lay in the middle, the Temples on either side, Slingsby nearest the opening.

"I wonder who's got our sheet?" began Tod, breaking a silence that ensued when we had wished each other good-night.

Nobody answered.

"I say," struck in Rupert, by-and-by, "I've heard one ought not to go to sleep in the moonlight: it turns people luny. Do any of your faces catch it, outside there?"

"Go to sleep and don't talk," said Temple.

It might have been through the novelty of the situation, but the night was well on before any of us got to sleep. Tod and Rupert Temple went off first, and next (I thought) Temple did. *I* did not.

I dare say you've never slept four in a bed—

and, that, one of littered straw. It's all very well to lie awake when you've a good wide mattress to yourself, and can toss and turn at will; but in the close quarters of a tent you can't do it for fear of disturbing the others. However, the longest watch has its ending; and I was just dropping off, when Temple, next to whom I lay, started hurriedly, and it aroused me.

"What's that?" he cried, in a half whisper.

I lifted my head, startled. He was sitting up, his eyes fixed on the opening we had left in the tent.

"Who's there?—who is it?" he said again; and his low voice had a slow, queer sound, as though he spoke in fear.

"What is it, Temple?" I asked.

"There, standing just outside the tent, right in the moonlight," whispered he. "Don't you see?"

I could see nothing. The stir awoke Rupert. He called out to know what ailed us; and that aroused Tod.

"Some man looking in at us," explained Temple in the same queer tone, half of abstraction, half of fear, his gaze still strained on the aperture. "He is gone now."

Up jumped Tod, and dashed outside the tent. Rupert struck a match and lighted the lantern. Nobody was to be seen but ourselves; and the only odd thing to be remarked was the white hue Temple's face had taken. Tod was marching round the tent, looking about him far and

near, and calling out to all intruders to show themselves. But all that met his eye was the level plain we were encamped upon, lying pale and white under the moonlight, and all the sound he heard was the croaking of the frogs.

"What could have made you fancy it?" he asked of Temple.

"Don't think it was fancy," responded Temple. "Never saw any man plainer in my life."

"You were dreaming, Slingsby," said Rupert. "Let us get to sleep again."

Which we did. At least, I can answer for myself.

The first beams of the glorious sun awoke us, and we rose to the beginning of another day, and to the cold, shivery feeling that, in spite of the heat of the past night and of the coming day, attends the situation. I could understand now why the nip of whisky, as Duffham called it, was necessary. Tod served it out. Lighting the fire of sticks to boil our tea-kettle—or the round pot that served for a kettle—we began to get things in order to embark again, when breakfast should be over.

"I say, Slingsby," cried Rupert to his brother, who seemed very silent, "what on earth took you, that you should disturb us in the night for nothing?"

"It was not for nothing. Someone was there."

"It must have been a stray sheep."

"Nonsense, Rupert! Could one mistake a sheep for a man?"

"Some benighted ploughman then, 'plodding his weary way.'"

"If you could bring forward any ploughman to testify that it was he beyond possibility of doubt, I'd give him a ten-pound note."

"Look here," said Tod, after staring a minute at this odd remark of Temple's, "you may put all idea of ploughmen and everybody else away. No one was there. If there had been, I must have seen him: it was not possible he could betake himself out of sight in a moment."

"Have it as you like," said Temple; "I am going to take a bath. My head aches."

Stripping, he plunged into the river, which was very wide just there, and swam towards the middle of it.

"It seems to have put Slingsby out," observed Rupert, alluding to the night alarm. "Do you notice how thoughtful he is? Just look at that fire!"

The sticks had turned black, and they began to smoke and hiss, giving out never a bit of blaze. Down knelt Rupert on one side and I on the other.

"Damp old obstinate things!" he ejaculated. And we set on to blow at them with all our might.

"Where's Temple?" I exclaimed presently, looking off, and not seeing him. Rupert glanced over the river.

"He must be diving, Johnny. Slingsby's fond of diving. Keep on blowing, lad, or we shall get no tea to-day."

So we kept on. But, I don't know why, a sort of doubtful feeling came over me, and while I blew I watched the water for Temple to come up. All in a moment he rose to the surface, gave one low, painful cry of distress, and disappeared again.

"Oh, my good heavens!" cried Rupert, leaping up and overturning the kettle.

But Tod was the quickest, and jumped in to the rescue. A first-rate swimmer and diver was he, almost as much at home in the water as out of it. In no time, as it seemed, he was striking back, bearing Temple. It was fortunate for such a crisis that Temple was so small and slight—of no weight to speak of.

By dint of gently rubbing and rolling, we got some life into him and some whisky down his throat. But he remained in the queerest, faintest state possible; no exertion in him, no movement hardly, no strength; alive, and that was about all; and just able to tell us that he had turned faint in the water.

"What is to be done?" cried Rupert. "We must get a doctor to him: and he ought not to lie on the grass here. I wonder if that farmer would let him be taken to his house for an hour or two?"

I got into my boots, and ran off to ask; and

met the farmer in the second field. He was coming towards us, curious perhaps to see whether we had started. Telling him what had happened, he showed himself all alive with sympathy, called some of his men to carry Temple to the farm, and sent back to prepare his wife. Their name we found was Best: and most hospitable, good-hearted people they turned out to be.

Well, Temple was taken there and a doctor was called in. The doctor shook his head, looked grave, and asked to have another doctor. Then, for the first time, doubts stole over us that it might be more serious than we had thought for. A dreadful feeling of fear took possession of me, and, in spite of all I could do, that scene at Oxford, when poor Fred Temple had been carried into old Mrs. Golding's to die, would not go out of my mind.

We got into our reserve clothes, as if conscious that the boating flannels were done with for the present, left one of the farmer's men to watch our boat and things, and stayed with Temple. He continued very faint, and lay nearly quite still. The doctors tried some remedies, but they did no good. He did not revive. One of them called it "syncope of the heart;" but the other said hastily, "No, no, that was not the right name." It struck me that perhaps they did not know what the right name was. At last they said Mrs. Temple had better be sent for.

"I was just thinking so," cried Rupert. "My

mother ought to be here. Who will go for her?"

"Johnny can," said Tod. "He is of no good here."

For that matter, none of us were any good, for we could do nothing for Temple.

I did not relish the task: I did not care to tell a mother that her son, whom she believes is well and hearty, is lying in danger. But I had to go: Rupert seemed to take it as a matter of course.

"Don't alarm her more than you can help, Ludlow," he said. "Say that Slingsby turned faint in the water this morning, and the medical men seem anxious. But ask her not to lose time."

Mr. Best started me on his own horse—a fine hunter, iron-grey. The weather was broiling. Templemore lay right across country, about six miles off by road. It was a beautiful place; I could see that much, though I had but little time to look at it; and it stood upon an eminence, the last mile of the road winding gradually up to its gates.

As ill-luck had it, or perhaps good-luck—I don't know which—Mrs. Temple was at one of the windows, and saw me ride hastily in. Having a good memory for faces, she recollected mine. Knowing that I had started with her sons in the boat, she was seized with a prevision that something was amiss, and came out before I was well off the horse.

"It is Mr. Ludlow, I think," she said, her plain dark face (so much like Slingsby's) very pale. "What ill news have you brought?"

I told her in the best manner I was able, just in the words Rupert had suggested, speaking quietly, and not showing any alarm in my own manner.

"Is there danger?" she at once asked.

"I am not *sure* that there is," I said, hardly knowing how to frame my answer. "The doctors thought you had better come, in case—in case of any danger arising; and Rupert sent me to ask you to do so."

She rang the bell, and ordered her carriage to be round instantly. "The bay horses," she added: "they are the fleetest. What will you take, Mr. Ludlow?"

I would not take anything. But a venerable old gentleman in black, with a powdered bald head—the butler, I concluded—suggested some lemonade, after my hot ride: and that I was glad of.

I rode on first, piloting the way for the carriage, which contained Mrs. Temple. She came alone: her daughter was away on a visit—as I had learnt from Rupert.

Slingsby lay in the same state, neither better nor worse: perhaps the breathing was somewhat more difficult. He smiled when he saw his mother, and put out his hand.

The day dragged itself slowly on. We did not know what to do with ourselves; that was a fact. Temple was to be kept quiet, and we might not intrude into his room—one on the ground-floor that faced the east: not even Rupert. Mr. and Mrs. Best entertained us well as far as meals went, but one can't be eating for ever. Now down in the meadow by the boat—which seemed to have assumed a most forlorn aspect—and now hovering about the farm, waiting for the last report of Temple. In that way the day crept through.

"Is it here that Mr. Temple is lying?"

I was standing under the jessamine-covered porch, sheltering my head from the rays of the setting sun, when a stranger came up and put the question. An extraordinary tall and thin man, with grey hair, clerical coat, and white neckcloth.

It was the Reverend Mr. Webster, perpetual curate of the parish around Templemore. And I seemed to know him before I heard his name, for he was the very image of his son, Long Webster, who used to be at Oxford.

"I am so grieved not to have been able to get here before," he said; "but I had just gone out for some hours when Mrs. Temple's message was brought to the parsonage. Is he any better?"

"I am afraid not," I answered. "We don't know what to make of it; it all seems so sudden and strange."

"But what is it?" he asked in a whisper.

"I don't know, sir. The doctors have said something about the heart."

"I should like to see the doctors before I go in to Mrs. Temple. Are they here?"

"One of them is, I think. They have been going in and out all day."

I fetched the doctor out to him; and they talked together in a low tone in the shaded and quiet porch. Not a ray of hope sat on the medical man's face: he as good as intimated that Temple was dying.

"Dear me!" cried the dismayed Mr. Webster.

"He seems to know it himself," continued the doctor. "At least, we fancy so, I and my brother practitioner. Though we have been most cautious not to alarm him by any hint of the kind."

"I should like to see him," said the parson. "I suppose I can?"

He went in, and was shut up for some time alone with Temple. Yes, he said, when he came out again, Temple knew all about it, and was perfectly resigned and prepared.

You may be sure there was no bed for any of us that night. Temple's breathing grew worse; and at last we went in by turns, one of us at a time, to prop up the pillows behind, and keep them propped: it seemed to make it firmer and easier for him as he lay against them. Towards morning I was called in to replace Rupert.

The shaded candle seemed to be burning dim.

"You can lie down, my dear," Mrs. Temple whispered to Rupert. "Should there be any change, I will call you."

He nodded, and left the room. Not to lie down. Only to sit over the kitchen fire with Tod, and so pass away the long hours of discomfort.

"Who is this now?" panted Slingsby, as I took my place.

"It is I. Johnny Ludlow. Do you feel any better?"

He made a little sound of dissent in answer.

"Nay, I think you look easier, my dear," said Mrs. Temple, gently.

"No, no," he said, just opening his eyes. "Do not grieve, mother. I shall be better off. I shall be with my father and Fred."

"Oh, my son, my son, don't lose heart!" she said with a sob. "That will never do."

"I saw my father last night," said Temple.

The words seemed to strike her with a sort of shock. "No!" she exclaimed, perhaps thinking of the Temple superstition, and drawing back a step. "Pray, pray don't fancy that!"

"The tent was open to give us air," he said, speaking with difficulty. "I suddenly saw some one standing in the moonlight. I was next the opening; and I had not been able to get to sleep. For a moment I thought it was some man,

some intruder passing by ; but he took a strange likeness to my father, and I thought he beckoned——"

"We are not alone, Slingsby," interrupted Mrs. Temple, remembering me, her voice cold, not to say haughty.

"Ludlow knows. He knew the last time. Fred said he saw him, and I—I ridiculed it. Ludlow heard me. My father came for Fred, mother ; he must have come for me."

"Oh, I can't—I can't believe this, Slingsby," she cried, in some excitement. "It was fancy —nervousness ; nothing else. My darling, I cannot lose you ! You have ever been dearer to me than my other children."

"Only for a little while, mother. It is God's will. That is our true home, you know ; and then there will be no more parting. I am quite happy. I seem to be half there now. What is that light ?"

Mrs. Temple looked round, and saw a faint streak coming in over the tops of the shutters. "It must be the glimmering of dawn in the east," she said. "The day is breaking."

"Ay," he answered : "my day. Where's Rupert ? I should like to say good-bye to him. Yes, mother, that's the dawn of heaven."

And just as the sun rose, he went there.

That was the end of our boating tour. Ridi-

cule has been cast on some of the facts, and will be again. It is a painful subject; and I don't know that I should have related it, but for its having led to another (and more lively) adventure, which I proceed to tell of.

V.

ROSE LODGE.

IT looked the prettiest place imaginable, lying under the sunlight, as we stood that first morning in front of the bay. The water was smooth and displayed lovely colours : now green, now blue, as the clouds passed over the face of the sky, now taking tinges of brown and amber ; and towards evening it would be pink and purple. Further on, the waters were rippling and shining in the sun. Fishing vessels stood out at sea, plying their craft ; little cockle-shells, their white sails set, disported on it ; rowing boats glided hither and thither. In the distance, the grand waves of the sea were ebbing and flowing ; a noble merchantman, all her canvas filled, was passing proudly on her outward-bound course.

"I should like to live here," cried Tod, turning away at last.

And I'm sure I felt that I should. For I could watch the ever-changing sea from morning to night, and not tire of it.

"Suppose we remain here, Johnny?"

"To live?"

"Nonsense, lad! For a month. I am going for a sail. Will you come?"

After the terrible break-up of our boating tour, poor Slingsby Temple was taken home to Templemore, ourselves going back to Sanbury to wait for the funeral, and for our black garments, for which we had sent. Rupert was fearfully cut up. Although he was the heir now, and would be chief of Templemore, I never saw any brother take a death more to heart. "Slingsby liked you much, Ludlow," said Rupert to me, when he came to us at the inn at Sanbury the day before the funeral, and the hot tears were running down his face as he spoke. "He always liked you at Oxford: I have heard him say so. Like himself, you kept yourself free from the lawlessness of the place——"

"As if a young one like Johnny would go in for anything of the kind!" interrupted Tod.

"Young?" repeated Rupert Temple. "Well, I don't know. When I was there myself, some young ones—lads—went in for a pretty good deal. He liked you much, Ludlow."

And somehow I liked to hear Rupert say it.

Quitting Sanbury after the funeral, we came to this little place, Cray Bay, which was on the sea coast, a few miles beyond Templemore. Our pleasure cut short at the beginning of the

holiday, we hardly knew what to do with the rest of it, and felt like two fish suddenly thrown out of water. Mrs. Temple, taking her son and daughter, went for change to her brother's, Lord Cracroft.

At Cray Bay we found one small inn, which bore the odd sign of the Whistling Wind, and was kept by Mrs. Jones, a stout Welshwoman. The bedroom she gave us enjoyed a look-out at some stables, and would not hold much more than the two small beds in it. In answer to Tod's remonstrances, she said that she had a better room, but it was just now occupied.

The discomforts of the lodging were forgotten when we strolled out to look about us, and saw the beauties of the sea and bay. Cray Bay was a very primitive spot: little else but a better-most fishing-place. It had not then been found out by the tour-taking world. Its houses were built anyhow and anywhere; its shops could be counted on your fingers: a butcher's, a baker's, a grocer's, and so on. Fishermen called at the doors with fish, and countrywomen with butter and fowls. There was no gas, and the place at night was lighted with oil-lamps. A trout-stream lay at the back of the village, half a mile away.

Stepping into a boat, on this first morning, for the sail proposed by Tod, we found its owner a talkative old fellow. His name was Druff, he said; he had lived at Cray Bay most

of his life, and knew every inch of its land and every wave of its sea. There couldn't be a nicer spot to stop at for the summer, as he took it; no, not if you searched the island through: and he supposed it was first called Cray Bay after the cray-fish, they being caught in plenty there.

"More things than one are called oddly in this place," remarked Tod. "Look at that inn: the Whistling Wind; what's that called after?"

"And so the wind do hoostle on this here coast; 'deed an' it do," returned Druff. "You'd not forget it if you heered it in winter."

The more we saw of Cray Bay that day, the more we liked it. Its retirement just suited our mood, after the experience of but four or five days back: for I can tell you that such a shock is not to be forgotten all in a moment. And when we went up to bed that night, Tod had made up his mind to stay for a time if lodgings could be found.

"Not in this garret, that you can't swing a cat in," said he, stretching out his hands towards the four walls. "Madame Jones won't have me here another night if I can help it."

"No. Our tent in the meadow was ten times livelier."

"Are there any lodgings to be had in this place?" asked Tod of the slip-shod maid-servant, when we were at breakfast the next morning. But she professed not to know of any.

"But, Tod, what would they say at home to our staying here?" I asked after awhile, certain doubts making themselves heard in my conscience.

"What they chose," said Tod, cracking his fourth egg.

"I am afraid the Pater——"

"Now, Johnny, you need not put in your word," he interrupted, in the off-hand tone that always silenced me. "It's not your affair. We came out for a month, and I am not going back home, like a bad sixpence returned, before the month has expired. Perhaps I shall tack a few weeks on to it. I am not dependent on the Pater's purse."

No; for he had his five hundred pounds lying untouched at the Worcester Old Bank, and his cheque-book in his pocket.

Breakfast over, we went out to look for lodgings; but soon feared it might be a hopeless search. Two little cottages had a handboard stuck on a stick in the garden, with "Lodgings" on it. But the rooms in each proved to be a tiny sitting-room and a more tiny bedroom, smaller than the garret at the Whistling Wind.

"I never saw such a world as this," cried Tod, as we paced disconsolately before the straggling dwellings in front of the bay. "If you want a thing you can't get it."

"We might find rooms in those houses yonder," I said, nodding towards some, scattered

about in the distance. "They must be farms."

"Who wants to live a mile off?" he retorted. "It's the place itself I like, and the bay, and the—— Oh, by George! Look there, Johnny!"

We had come to the last house in the place —a fresh-looking, charming cottage, with a low roof and a green verandah, that we had stopped to admire yesterday. It faced the bay, and stood by itself in a garden that was a perfect bower of roses. The green gate bore the name "Rose Lodge," and in the parlour window appeared a notice "To Let;" which notice, we both felt sure, had not been there the previous day.

"Fancy their having rooms to let here!" cried Tod. "The nicest little house in all the place. How lucky!"

In he went impulsively, striding up the short gravel path, which was divided from the flower-beds by two rows of sea-shells, and knocked at the door. It was opened by a tall grenadier of a female, rising six feet, with a spare figure and sour face. She had a large cooking-apron on, dusted with flour.

"You have lodgings to let," said Tod; "can I see them?"

"Lodgings to let?" she repeated, scanning us up and down attentively; and her voice sounded harsh and rasping. "I don't know that we have. You had better see Captain Copperas."

She threw open the door of the parlour: a small, square, bright-looking room, rather full of furniture; a gay carpet, a cottage piano, and some green chairs being among the articles.

Captain Copperas came forward: a retired seaman, as we heard later; tall as the grenadier, and with a brown, weather-beaten face. But in voice and manners he, at any rate, did not resemble her, for they were just as pleasant as they could be.

"I have no lodgings," said he; "my servant was mistaken. My house is to let; and the furniture to be taken to."

Which announcement was of course a vast check upon Tod. He sat looking very blank, and then explained that we only required lodgings. We had been quite charmed with Cray Bay, and would like to stay in it for a month or so: and that it was *his* misapprehension, not the servant's."

"It's a pity but you wanted a little house," said Captain Copperas. "This is the most compact, desirable, perfect little dwelling mortal man ever was in. Rent twenty-six pounds a year only, furniture to be bought out-and-out for a hundred and twenty-five. It would be a little Eden—a paradise—to those who had the means to take it."

As he spoke, he regarded us individually and rather pointedly. It looked as much as to doubt whether we had the means. Tod (conscious of

his five hundred pounds in the bank) threw his head up.

"Oh, I have the means," said he, as haughtily as poor Slingsby Temple had ever spoken. "Johnny, did you put any cards in your pocket? Give Captain Copperas one."

I laid one of Tod's cards on the table. The Captain took it up.

"It's a great grief to me to leave the house," he remarked. "Especially after having been only a few months in it!—and laying in a stock of the best furniture in a plain way, purchased in the best market! Downright grief."

"Then why do you leave it?" naturally asked Tod.

"Because I have to go afloat again," said the sailor, his face taking a rueful expression. "I thought I had given up the sea for good; but my old employers won't let me give it up. They know my value as a master, and have offered me large terms for another year or two of service. A splendid new East Indiaman, two thousand tons register, and—and, in short, I don't like to be ungrateful, so I have said I'll go."

"Could you not keep on the house until you come back?"

"My sister won't let me keep it on. Truth to say, she never cared for the sea, and wants to get away from it. That exquisite scene"—extending his hand towards the bay, and to a steamer working her way onwards near the horizon

—"has no charms for Miss Copperas; and she intends to betake herself off to our relatives in Leeds. No: I can only give the place up, and dispose of the furniture to whomsoever feels inclined to take it. It will be a fine sacrifice. I shall not get the one half of the money I gave for it; don't look to. And all of it as good as new!"

I could read Tod's face as a book, and the eager look in his eyes. He was thinking how much he should like to seize upon the tempting bargain; to make the pretty room we sat in, and the prettier prospect yonder, his own. Captain Copperas appeared to read him also.

"You are doubting whether to close with the offer or not," he said, with a frank smile. "You might make it yours for a hundred and twenty-five pounds. Perhaps—pardon me; you are both but young—you may not have the sum readily at command?"

"Oh yes, I have," said Tod, candidly. "I have it lying at my banker's, in Worcester. No, it's not for that reason I hesitate. It is—it is—fancy me with a house on my hands!" he broke off, turning to me with a laugh.

"It is an offer that you will never be likely to meet with again, sir."

"But what on earth could I do with the house and the things afterwards—allowing that we stayed here for a month or two?" urged Tod.

"Why, dispose of them again, of course," was

the ready answer of Captain Copperas. "You'd find plenty of people willing to purchase, and to take the house off your hands. Such an opportunity as this need not go begging. I only wish I had not to be off all in a jiffy; I should make a very different bargain."

"I'll think of it," said Tod, as we got up to leave. "I must say it is a nice little nest."

In the doorway we encountered a tall lady, with a brown face and a scarlet top-knot. She wore a thick gold chain, and bracelets to match.

"My sister, Miss Copperas," said the captain. And he explained to her in a few words our business, and the purport of what had passed.

"For goodness' sake, don't lose the opportunity!" cried she, impressively affectionate, as though she had known us all our lives. "So advantageous an offer was never made to anyone before; and but for my brother's obstinately and wickedly deciding to go off to that wretched sea again, it would not be made now. Yes, Alexander," turning to him, "I do call it quite wicked. Only think, sir"—to Tod—"a houseful of beautiful furniture, every individual thing that a family can want; a piano here, a tablecloth press in the kitchen; plate, linen, knives, forks; a garden full of roses and a roller for the paths: and all to go for the miserably inadequate sum of a hundred and twenty-five pounds! But that's my brother all over. He's a true sailor.

Setting himself up in a home to-day, and selling it off for an old song to-morrow!"

"Well, well, Fanny," he said, when he could get a word in edgeways to stem the torrent of eloquence, "I have agreed to go, and I must go."

"Have you been over the house?" she resumed, in the same voluble manner. "No? Then do pray come and see it. Oh, don't talk of trouble. This is the dining-room," throwing open a door behind her.

It was a little side-room, looking up the coast and over the fields; just enough chairs and tables in it for use. Upstairs we found three chambers, with their beds and other things. It all looked very comfortable, and I thought Captain Copperas was foolish to ask so small a sum.

"This is the linen-closet," said Miss Copperas, opening a narrow door at the top of the stairs, and displaying some shelves that seemed to be well filled. "Sheets, table-cloths, dinner-napkins, towels, pillow-cases; everything for use. Anybody, taking the house, has only to step in, hang up his hat, and find himself at home. Look at those plates and dishes!" she ran on, as we got down again and entered the kitchen. "They are very nice—and enough to dine ten people."

They were of light blue ware, and looked nice enough on the dresser shelves. The grenadier stood at the table, chopping parsley on a trencher, and did not condescend to take any notice of us.

Out in the garden next, amidst the roses—

which grew all round the house, clustering everywhere. They were of that species called the cabbage-rose; large, and fragrant, and most beautiful. It made me think of the Roses by Bendemeer's stream.

"I should like the place of all things!" cried Tod, as we strolled towards the bay to get a sail; and found Druff seated in his boat, smoking. "I say, Druff, do you know Captain Copperas?—Get in, Johnny."

"Lives next door to me, at Rose Lodge," answered Druff.

"Next door! What, is that low whitewashed shanty your abode? How long has Copperas lived here?"

"A matter of some months," said Druff. "He came in the spring."

"Are they nice kind of people?"

"They be civil to me," answered Druff. "Sent my old missis a bottle o' wine in, and some hot broth t'other day, when she was ill. The Captain——"

A sudden lurch put a stop to the discourse, and in a few minutes we glided out of the bay, Tod sitting in a brown reverie, his gaze fixed on the land and on Rose Lodge.

"My mind's made up, Johnny. I shall take the place."

I dropped my knife and fork in very astonishment. Our sail over, we were at dinner in the bar-parlour of the Whistling Wind.

"Surely you won't do it, Tod!"

"Surely I shall, lad. I never saw such a nice little nest in all my life. And there's no risk; you heard what Copperas said; I shall get my money back again when we want to leave it."

"Look here, Tod: I was thinking a bit while we sat in the boat. Does it not seem to you to be too good to be genuine?"

It was Tod's turn now to drop his knife and fork; and he did it angrily. "Just tell me what you mean, Johnny Ludlow."

"All that furniture, and the piano, and the carpets, and the plate and linen: it looks such a heap to be going for only a hundred and twenty-five pounds."

"Well?"

"I can't think that Copperas means it."

"*Not mean it!* Why, you young muff! *There are the things*, and he has offered them to me. If Copperas chooses to part with them for half their value, is it my place to tell him he's a fool? The poor man is driven into a corner through lack of time. Sailors are uncommonly improvident."

"It is such an undertaking, Tod."

"It is not your undertaking."

"Of course it is a tremendous bargain; and it is a beautiful little place to have. But I can't think what the Pater will say to it."

"I can," said Tod. "When he hears of it—but that will not be yet awhile—he will come off

here post-haste to blow me up; and end by falling in love with the roses. He always says that there is no rose like a cabbage-rose."

"He will never forgive you, Tod; or me either. He will say the world's coming to an end."

"If you are afraid of him, young Johnny, you can betake yourself off. Hold up your plate for some more lamb, and hold your tongue."

There was no help for it; anything I could say would have no more weight with Tod than so much wasted water; so I did as he bade me, and held my tongue. Down he went to Captain Copperas ere his dinner was well swallowed, and told him he would take the house. The Captain said he would have a short agreement drawn up; and Tod took out his cheque-book, to give a cheque for the money there and then. But the Captain, like an honest man, refused to receive it until the agreement was executed; and, if all the same, he would prefer money down, to a cheque. Cheques were all very good, no doubt, he said; but sailors did not much understand them. Oh, of course, Tod answered, shaking him by the hand; he would get the money.

Inquiring of our landlady for the nearest bank, Tod was directed to a town called St. Ann's, three miles off; and we started for it at once, pelting along the hot and dusty road. The bank found—a small one with a glazed bow-window, Tod presented a cheque for a hundred

and fifty pounds, twenty-five of it being for himself, and asked the clerk to cash it.

The clerk looked at the cheque, then looked at Tod, and then at me. "This is not one of our cheques," he said. "We have no account in this name."

"Can't you read?" asked Tod. "The cheque is upon the Worcester Old Bank. You know it well by reputation, I presume?"

The clerk whisked into a small kind of box, divided from the office by glass, where sat a bald-headed gentleman writing at a desk full of pigeon-holes. A short conference, and then the latter came to us, holding the cheque in his hand.

"We will send and present this at Worcester," he said; "and shall get an answer the day after to-morrow. No doubt we shall then be able to give you the money."

"Why can't you give it me now?" asked Tod, in rather a fiery tone.

"Well, sir, we should be happy to do it; but it is not our custom to cash cheques for strangers."

"Do you fear the cheque will not be honoured?" flashed Tod. "Why, I have five hundred pounds lying there! Do you suppose I want to cheat you?"

"Oh, certainly not," said the banker, with suavity. "Only, you see, we cannot break through our standing rules. Call upon us the day after to-morrow, and doubtless the money will be ready."

Tod came away swearing. "The infamous upstarts!" cried he. "To refuse to cash my cheque! Johnny, it's my belief they take us for a couple of adventurers."

The money came in due course. After receiving it from the cautious banker, we went straight to Rose Lodge, pelting back from St. Ann's at a fine pace. Tod signed the agreement, and paid the cash in good Bank of England notes. Captain Copperas brought out a bottle of champagne, which tasted uncommonly good to our thirsty throats. He was to leave Cray Bay that night on his way to Liverpool to take possession of his ship; Miss Copperas would leave on the morrow, and then we should go in. And Elizabeth, the grenadier, was to remain with us as servant. Miss Copperas recommended her, hearing Tod say he did not know where to look for one. We bargained with her to keep up a good supply of pies, and to pay her twenty shillings a month.

"Will you allow me to leave one or two of my boxes for a few days?" asked Miss Copperas of Tod, when we went down on the following morning, and found her equipped for departure. "This has been so hurried a removal that I have not had time to pack all my things, and must leave it for Elizabeth to do."

"Leave anything you like, Miss Copperas," replied Tod, as he shook hands. "Do what you please. I'm sure the house seems more like yours than mine."

She thanked him, wished us both good-bye, and set off to walk to the coach-office, attended by the grenadier, and a boy wheeling her luggage. And we were in possession of our new home.

It was just delightful. The weather was charming, though precious hot, and the new feeling of being in a house of our own, with not as much as a mouse to control us and our movements, was satisfactory in the highest degree. We passed our days sailing about with old Druff, and came home to the feasts prepared by the grenadier, and to sit among the roses. Altogether we had never had a time like it. Tod took the best chamber, facing the sea; I had the smaller one over the dining-room, looking up coastwards.

"I shall go fishing to-morrow, Johnny," Tod said to me one evening. "We'll bring home some trout for supper."

He was stretched on three chairs before the open window; coat off, pipe in mouth. I turned round from the piano. It was not much of an instrument. Miss Copperas had said, when I hinted so to her on first trying it, that it wanted "age."

"Shall you? All right," I answered, sitting

down by him. The stars were shining on the calm blue water ; here and there lights, looking like stars also, twinkled from some vessels at anchor.

"If I thought they'd not quite die of the shock, Johnny, I'd send the Pater and Madam an invitation to come off here and pay us a visit. They would fall in love with the place at once."

"Oh, Tod, I wish you would!" I cried, eagerly seizing on the words. "They could have your room, and you have mine, and I would go into the little one at the back."

"I dare say! I was only joking, lad."

The last words and their tone destroyed my hopes. It is inconvenient to possess a conscience. Advantageous though the bargain was that Tod had made, and delightfully though our days were passing, I could not feel easy until they knew of it at home.

"I wish you would let me write and tell them, Tod."

"No," said he; "I don't want the Pater to whirl himself off here and spoil our peace—for that's what would come of it."

"He thinks we are in some way with the Temples. His letter implied it."

"The best thing he can think."

"But I want to write to the mother, Tod. She must be wondering why I don't."

"Wondering won't give her the fever, lad.

Understand me, Mr. Johnny: you are not to write."

Breakfast over in the morning, we crossed the meadows to the trout stream, with the fishing-tackle and a basket of frogs. Tod complained of the intense heat. The dark blue sky was cloudless; the sun beat down upon our heads.

"I'll tell you what, Johnny," he said, when we had borne the blaze for an hour on the banks, the fish refusing to bite; "we should be all the cooler for our umbrellas. You'll get a sunstroke, if you don't look out."

"It strikes me you won't get any fish to-day."

"Does it? You be off and get the parapluies."

The low front window stood open when I reached home. It was the readiest way of entering; and I passed on to the passage to the umbrella-stand. The grenadier came dashing out of her kitchen, looking frightened.

"Oh!" said she, "it's you!"

"I have come back for the umbrellas, Elizabeth; the sun's like a furnace. Why! what have you got there?"

The kitchen was strewed with clothes from one end of it to the other. On the floor stood the two boxes left by Miss Copperas.

"I am only putting up Miss Copperas's things," returned Elizabeth, in her surly way. "It's time they were sent off."

"What a heap she must have left behind!"

I remarked, and left the grenadier to her work.

We got home in the evening, tired out. The grenadier had a choice supper ready; and, in answer to me, said the trunks of Miss Copperas were packed and gone. When bed-time came, Tod was asleep at the window, and wouldn't awake. The grenadier had gone to her room ages ago; I wanted to go to mine.

"Tod, then! Do please wake up: it is past ten."

A low growl answered me. And in that same moment I became aware of some mysterious stir outside the front gate. People seemed to be trying it. The grenadier always locked it at night.

"Tod! Tod! There are people at the gate —trying to get in."

The tone and the words aroused him. "Eh? What do you say, Johnny? People trying the gate?"

"Listen! They are whispering to one another. They are trying the fastenings."

"What on earth does anybody want at this time of night?" growled Tod. "And why can't they ring like decent people? What's your business?" he roared out from the window. "Who the dickens are you?"

"Hush, Todd! It—it can't be the Squire, can it? Come down here to look after us."

The suggestion silenced him for a moment.

"I—I don't think so, Johnny," he slowly said. "No, it's not the Squire: he would be letting off at us already from the top of his voice; he'd not wait to come in to do it. Let's go and see. Come along."

Two young men stood at the gate. One of them turned the handle impatiently as we went down the path.

"What do you want?" demanded Tod.

"I wish to see Captain Copperas."

"Then you can't see him," answered Tod, woefully cross after being startled out of his sleep. "Captain Copperas does not live here."

"Not live here!" repeated the man. "That's gammon. I know he does live here."

"I tell you he does not," haughtily repeated Tod. "Do you doubt my word?"

"Who does live here, then?" asked the man, in a different tone, evidently impressed.

"Mr. Todhetley."

"I can take my oath that Captain Copperas lived here ten days ago."

"What of that? He is gone, and Mr. Todhetley's come."

"Can I see Mr. Todhetley?"

"You see him now. I am he. Will you tell me your business?"

"Captain Copperas owes me a small account, and I want it settled."

The avowal put Tod in a rage; and he showed it. "A small account! Is this a proper time

to come bothering gentlemen for your small accounts—when folks are gone to bed, or going?"

"Last time I came in the afternoon. Perhaps that was the wrong time? Any way, Captain Copperas put me off, saying I was to call some evening, and he'd pay it."

"And I'll thank you to betake yourself off again now. How dare you disturb people at this unearthly hour? As to Captain Copperas, I tell you that he is no longer here."

"Then I should say that Captain Copperas was a swindler."

Tod turned on his heel at the last words, and the men went away, their retreating footsteps echoing on the road. I thought I heard the grenadier's window being shut, so the noise must have disturbed her.

"Swindlers themselves!" cried Tod, as he fastened the house-door. "I'll lay you a guinea, Johnny, they were two loose fellows trying to sneak inside and see what they could pick up."

Nevertheless, in the morning he asked the grenadier whether it was true that such men had come there after any small account. And the grenadier resented the supposition indignantly. Captain Copperas owed no "small accounts" that she knew of, she said; and she had lived with him and Miss C—— ever since they came to Cray Bay. She only wished she had seen the men herself last night; she would have answered them. And when, upon this, I

said I thought I had heard her shut her window down, and supposed she had been listening, she denied it, and accused me of being fanciful.

"Impudent wretches!" ejaculated Tod; "to come here and asperse a man of honour like Copperas."

That day passed off quietly, and to our thorough enjoyment; but the next one was fated to bring us some events. Some words of Tod's, as I was pouring out the breakfast coffee, startled me.

"Oh, by Jupiter! How have they found us out here?"

Looking up, I saw the postman entering the gate with a letter. The same thought struck us both—that it was some terrible mandate from the Squire. Tod went to the window and held out his hand.

"For Elizabeth, at Captain Copperas's," read out the man, as he handed it to Tod. It was like a relief, and Tod sent me with it to the grenadier.

But in less than one minute afterwards she came into the room, bathed in tears. The letter was to tell her that her mother was lying ill at their home, some unpronounceable place in Wales, and begging earnestly to see her.

"I'm sorry to leave you at a pinch; but I must go," sobbed the grenadier. "I can't help myself; I shall start by the afternoon coach."

Well, of course there was nothing to be said against it. A mother was a mother. But Tod

began to wonder what on earth we should do: as did I, for the matter of that. The grenadier offered to cook our luncheon before starting, which we looked upon as a concession.

"Let's go for a sail, Johnny, and leave perplexities to right themselves."

And a glorious sail we had! Upon getting back at one o'clock, we found a huge meat pie upon the luncheon-table, and the grenadier with her bonnet on. Tod handed her five shillings; the sum, as she computed, that was due to her.

We heard the bumping of her boxes on the stairs. At the gate stood the boy with the truck, ready to wheel them to the coach-office, as he had wheeled those of Miss Copperas. Tod was helping himself to some more pie, when the grenadier threw open the door.

"My boxes are here, gentlemen. Will you like to look at them?"

"Look at them for what?" asked Tod, after staring a minute.

"To see that I'm taking none of your property away inside them."

At last Tod understood what she meant, and felt inclined to throw the dish at her head. "Shut the door, and don't be a fool," said he. "And I hope you'll find your mother better," I called out after him.

"And now, Johnny, what are we to do?" cried he, when the lunch was over and there was

nobody to take it away. "This is like a second experience of Robinson Crusoe."

We left it where it was, and went off to the shops and the Whistling Wind, asking if they could tell us of a servant. But servants seemed not to be forthcoming at a pinch; and we told our troubles to old Druff.

"My missis shall come in and see a bit to things for ye," said he. "She can light the fire in the morning, anyway, and boil the kettle."

And with the aid of Mother Druff—an ancient dame who went about in clogs—we got on till after breakfast in the morning, when a damsel came after the place. She wore a pink gauze bonnet, smart and tawdry, and had a pert manner.

"Can you cook?" asked Tod.

The substance of her answer was, that she could do everything under the sun, provided she were not "tanked" after. Her late missis was for ever a-tanking. Would there be any washing to do?—because washing didn't agree with her: and how often could she go out, and what was the wages?

Tod looked at me in doubt, and I slightly shook my head. It struck me that she would not do at any price. "I think you won't suit," said he to her.

"Oh," returned she, all impertinence. "I can go then where I shall suit: and so, good-morning, gentlemen. There's no call for you to be so uppish. I didn't come after your forks and spoons."

"The impudent young huzzy!" cried Tod, as she slammed the gate after her. "But she might do better than nobody, Johnny."

"I don't like her, Tod. If it rested with me, I'd rather live upon bread and cheese than take her."

"Bread and cheese!" he echoed. "It is not a question of only bread and cheese. We must get our beds made and the knives cleaned."

It seemed rather a blue look-out. Tod said he would go up again to the Whistling Wind, and tell Mother Jones she must find us some one. Picking a rose as he went down the path, he met a cleanly-looking elderly woman who was entering. She wore a dark apron, and old-fashioned white cap, and said she had come after the place.

"What can you do?" began Tod. "Cook?"

"Cook and clean too, sir," she answered. And I liked the woman the moment I saw her.

"Oh, I don't know that there's much cleaning to do, beyond the knives," remarked Tod. "We want our dinners cooked, you know, and the beds made. That's about all."

The woman smiled at that, as if she thought he knew little about it. "I have been living at the grocer's, up yonder, sir, and they can give me a good character, though I say it. I'm not afraid of doing all you can want done, and of giving satisfaction, if you'd please to try me."

"You'll do," said Tod, after glancing at me. "Can you come in at once?"

"As soon as you like, sir. When would you please to go for my character?"

"Oh, bother that!" said he. "I've no doubt you are all right. Can you make pigeon-pies?"

"That I can, sir."

"You'll do, then. What is your name?"

"Elizabeth Ho——"

"Elizabeth!" he interrupted, not giving her time to finish. "Why, the one just gone was Elizabeth. A grenadier, six feet high."

"I've been mostly called Betty, sir."

"Then we'll call you Betty, too."

She went away, saying that she'd come back with her aprons. Tod looked after her.

"You like her, don't you, Johnny?"

"That I do. She's a good sort; honest as honest can be. You did not ask her about wages."

"Oh, time enough for that," said he.

And Betty turned out to be as good as gold. Her history was a curious one; she told it to me one evening in the kitchen; in her small way she had been somewhat of a martyr. But God had been with her always, she said; through more trouble than the world knew of.

We got a letter from Mrs. Todhetley, re-directed on from Sanbury. The chief piece of news it contained was, that the Squire and old

Jacobson had gone off to Great Yarmouth for a fortnight.

"That's good," said Tod. "Johnny lad, you may write home now."

"And tell about Rose Lodge?"

"Tell all you like. I don't mind Madam. She'll have leisure to digest it against the Pater returns."

I wrote a long letter, and told everything, going into the minute details that she liked to hear, about the servants, and all else. Rose Lodge was the most wonderful bargain, I said, and we were both as happy as the days were long.

The church was a little primitive edifice near the sands. We went to service on Sunday morning; and, upon getting home afterwards, found the cloth not laid. Tod had ordered dinner to be on the table. He sent me to the kitchen to blow up Betty.

"It is quite ready and waiting to be served; but I can't find a clean tablecloth," said Betty.

"Why, I told you where the tablecloths were," shouted out Tod, who heard the answer. "In that cupboard at the top of the stairs."

"But there are no tablecloths there, sir," cried she. "Nor anything else either, except a towel or two."

Tod went upstairs in a passion, bidding her follow him, and flung the cupboard-door open. He thought she had looked in the wrong place.

But Betty was right. With the exception of

two or three old towels and some stacks of newspapers, the cupboard was empty.

"By Jove!" cried Tod. "Johnny, that grenadier must have walked off with all the linen!"

Whether she had, or had not, none to speak of could be found now. Tod talked of sending the police after her, and wrote an account of her delinquencies to Captain Copperas, addressing the letter to the Captain's brokers in Liverpool.

"But," I debated, not quite making matters out to my own satisfaction, "the grenadier wanted us to examine her boxes, you know."

"All for a blind, Johnny."

It was the morning following this day, Monday, that, upon looking from my window, something struck me as being the matter with the garden. What was it? Why, all the roses were gone! Down I rushed, half dressed, burst out at the back-door, and gazed about me.

It was a scene of desolation. The rose-trees had been stripped; every individual rose was clipped neatly off from every tree. Two or three trees were left untouched before the front window; all the rest were rifled.

"What the mischief is the matter, Johnny?" called out Tod, as I was hastily questioning Betty. "You are making enough noise, lad."

"We have had robbers here, Todd. Thieves. All the roses are stolen."

He made a worse noise than I did. Down he came, full rush, and stamped about the garden like anybody wild. Old Druff and his wife heard him, and came up to the palings. Betty, busy in her kitchen, had not noticed the disaster.

"I see Tasker's people here betimes this morning," observed Druff. "A lot of 'em came. 'Twas a pity, I thought, to slice off all them nice big blows."

"Saw who?—saw what?" roared Tod, turning his anger upon Druff. "You mean to confess to me that you saw these rose-trees rifled, and did not stop it?"

"Nay, master," said Druff, "how could I interfere with Tasker's people? Their business ain't mine."

"Who are Tasker's people?" foamed Tod. "Who is Tasker?"

"Tasker? Oh, Tasker's that there man at the white cottage on t'other side the village. Got a big garden round it."

"Is he a poacher? Is he a robber?"

"Bless ye, master, Tasker's no robber."

"And yet you saw him take my roses?"

"I see him for certain. I see him busy with the baskets as the men filled 'em."

Dragging me after him, Tod went striding off to Tasker's. We knew the man by sight; had once spoken to him about his garden. He was a kind of nurseryman. Tasker was standing near his greenhouse.

"Why did I come and steal your roses?" he quietly repeated, when he could understand Tod's fierce demands. "I didn't *steal* 'em, sir; I picked 'em."

"And how dared you do it? Who gave you leave to do it?" foamed Tod, turning green and purple.

"I did it because they were mine."

"Yours! Are you mad?"

"Yes, sir, mine. I bought 'em and paid for 'em."

Tod did think him mad at the moment; I could see it in his face. "Of whom, pray, did you buy them?"

"Of Captain Copperas. I had 'em from the garden last year and the year afore: other folks lived in the place then. Three pounds I gave for 'em this time. The Captain sold 'em to me a month ago, and I was to take my own time for gathering them."

I don't think Tod had ever felt so *floored* in all his life. He stood back against the pales and stared. A month ago we had not known Captain Copperas.

"I might have took all the lot: 'twas in the agreement: but I left ye a few afore the front winder," said Tasker, in an injured tone. "And you come and attack me like this!"

"But what do you want with them? What are they taken for?"

"To make otter of roses," answered Tasker. "I sell 'em to the distillers."

"At any rate, though it be as you say, I would have taken them openly," contended Tod. "Not come like a thief in the night."

"But then I had to get 'em afore the sun was powerful," calmly answered Tasker.

Tod was silent all the way home. I had not spoken a word, good or bad. Betty brought in the coffee.

"Pour it out," said he to me. "But, Johnny," he presently added, as he stirred his cup slowly round, "I *can't* think how it was that Copperas forgot to tell me he had sold the roses."

"Do you suppose he did forget?"

"Why, *of course* he forgot. Would an honest man like Copperas conceal such a thing if he did not forget it? You will be insinuating next, Johnny Ludlow, that he is as bad as Tasker."

I must say we were rather in the dumps that day. Tod went off fishing; I carried the basket and things. I did wish I had not said so much about the roses to Mrs. Todhetley. What I wrote was, that they were brighter and sweeter and better than those other roses by Bendemeer's Stream.

I thought of the affair all day long. I thought of it when I was going to bed at night. Putting out the candle, I leaned from my window and looked down on the desolate garden. The roses had made its beauty.

"Johnny! Johnny lad! Are you in bed?"

The cautious whisper came from Tod. Bring-

ing my head inside the room, I saw him at the door in his slippers and braces.

"Come into my room," he whispered. "Those fellows who disturbed us the other night are at the gate again."

Tod's light was out and his window open. We could see a man bending down outside the gate, fumbling with its lock. Presently the bell was pulled very gently, as if the ringer thought the house might be asleep and he did not want to awaken it. There was something quite ghostly to the imagination in being disturbed at night like this.

"Who's there?" shouted Tod.

"I am," answered a cautious voice. "I want to see Captain Copperas."

"Come along, Johnny. This is getting complicated."

We went out to the gate, and saw a man: he was not either of the two who had come before. Tod answered him as he had answered them, but did not open the gate.

"Are you a friend of the Captain's?" whispered the man.

"Yes, I am," said Tod. "What then?"

"Well, see here," resumed he, in a confidential tone. "If I don't get to see him it will be the worse for him. I come as a friend; come to warn him."

"But I tell you he is not in the house," argued Tod. "He has let it to me. He has left Cray

Bay. His address? No, I cannot give it you."

"Very well," said the man, evidently not believing a word, "I am come out of friendliness. If you know where he is, you just tell him that Jobson has been here, and warns him to look out for squalls. That's all."

"I say, Johnny, I shall begin to fancy we are living in some mysterious castle, if this kind of thing is to go on," remarked Tod, when the man had gone. "It seems deuced queer, altogether."

It seemed queerer still the next morning. For a gentleman walked in and demanded payment for the furniture. Captain Copperas had forgotten to settle for it, he said—if he *had* gone away. Failing the payment, he should be obliged to take away the chairs and tables. Tod flew in a rage, and ordered him out of the place. Upon which their tongues went in for a pitched battle, and gave out some unorthodox words. Cooling down by-and-by, an explanation was come to.

He was a member of some general furnishing firm, ten miles off. Captain Copperas had done them the honour to furnish his house from their stores, including the piano, paying a small portion on account. Naturally they wanted the rest. In spite of certain strange doubts that were arising touching Captain Copperas, Tod resolutely refused to give any clue to his address.

Finally the applicant agreed to leave matters as they were for three or four days, and wrote a letter to be forwarded to Copperas.

But the news that arrived from Liverpool staggered us more than all. The brokers sent back Tod's first letter to Copperas (telling him of the grenadier's having marched off with the linen), and wrote to say that they didn't know any Captain Copperas; that no gentleman of that name was in their employ, or in command of any of their ships.

As Tod had remarked, it seemed deuced queer. People began to come in, too, for petty accounts that appeared to be owing—a tailor, a bootmaker, and others. Betty shed tears.

One evening, when we had come in from a long day's fishing, and were sitting at dinner in rather a gloomy mood, wondering what was to be the end of it, we caught sight of a man's coat whisking its tails up to the front-door.

"Sit still," cried Tod to me, as the bell rang. "It's another of those precious creditors. Betty! don't you open the door. Let the fellow cool his heels a bit."

But, instead of cooling his heels, the fellow stepped aside to our open window, and stood there, looking in at us. I leaped out of my chair, and nearly out of my skin. It was Mr. Brandon.

"And what do you two fine gentlemen think of yourselves?" began he, when we had let him in. "You don't starve, at any rate, it seems."

"You'll take some, won't you, Mr. Brandon?" said Tod politely, putting the breast of a duck upon a plate, while I drew a chair for him to the table.

Ignoring the offer, he sat down by the window, threw his yellow silk handkerchief across his head, as a shade against the sun and the air, and opened upon our delinquencies in his thinnest tones. In the Squire's absence, Mrs. Todhetley had given him my letter to read, and begged him to come and see after us, for she feared Tod might be getting himself into some inextricable mess. Old Brandon's sarcasms were keen. To make it worse, he had heard of the new complications, touching Copperas and the furniture, at the Whistling Wind.

"So!" said he, "you must take a house and its responsibilities upon your shoulders, and pay the money down, and make no inquiries!"

"We made lots of inquiries," struck in Tod, wincing.

"Oh, did you? Then I was misinformed. You took care to ascertain whether the landlord of the house would accept you as tenant; whether the furniture was the man's own to sell, and had no liabilities upon it; whether the rent and taxes had been paid up to that date?"

As Tod had done nothing of the kind, he could only slash away at the other duck, splashing the stuffing about, and bite his lips.

"You took to a closet of linen, and did not

think it necessary to examine whether linen was there, or whether it was all dumb-show——"

"I'm sure the linen was there when we saw it," interrupted Tod.

"You can't be sure; you did not handle it, or count it. The Squire told you you would hasten to make ducks and drakes of your five hundred pounds. It must have been burning a hole in your pocket. As to you, Johnny Ludlow, I am utterly surprised: I did give you credit for possessing some sense."

"I could not help it, sir. I'm sure I should never have mistrusted Captain Copperas." But doubts had floated in my mind whether the linen had not gone away in those boxes of Miss Copperas, that I saw the grenadier packing.

Tod pulled a letter-case out of his breast-pocket, selected a paper, and handed it to Mr. Brandon. It was the cheque for one hundred pounds.

"I thought of you, sir, before I began upon the ducks and drakes. But you were not at home, and I could not give it you then. And I thank you very much indeed for what you did for me."

Mr. Brandon read the cheque and nodded his head sagaciously.

"I'll take it, Joseph Todhetley. If I don't, the money will only go in folly." By which I fancied he had not meant to have the money repaid to him.

"I think you are judging me rather hardly," said Tod. "How was I to imagine that the man was not on the square? When the roses were here, the place was the prettiest place I ever saw. And it was dirt-cheap."

"So was the furniture, to Copperas," cynically observed Mr. Brandon.

"What is done is done," growled Tod. "May I give you some raspberry pudding?"

"Some what? Raspberry pudding! Why, I should not digest it for a week. I want to know what you are going to do."

"*I* don't know, sir. Do you?"

"Yes. Get out of the place to-morrow. You can't stay in it with bare walls: and it's going to be stripped, I hear. Green simpletons, you must be! I dare say the landlord will let you off by paying him three months' rent. I'll see him myself. And you'll both come home with me, like two young dogs with their tails burnt."

"And lose all the money I've spent?" cried Tod.

"Ay, and think yourself well off that it is not more. You possess no redress; as to finding Copperas, you may as well set out to search for the philosopher's stone. It is nobody's fault but your own; and if it shall bring you caution, it may be an experience cheaply bought."

"I could never have believed it of a sailor," Todd remarked ruefully to old Druff, when we were preparing to leave.

"Ugh! fine sailor he was!" grunted Druff. "*He* warn't a sailor. Not a reg'lar one. Might ha' been about the coast a bit in a collier, perhaps—naught more. As to that grenadier, I believe she was just another of 'em—a sister."

But we heard a whiff of news later that told us Captain Copperas was not so bad as he seemed. After he had taken Rose Lodge and furnished it, some friend, for whom in his goodnature he had stood surety to a large amount, let him in for the whole, and ruined him. Honest men are driven into by-paths sometimes.

And so that was the inglorious finale to our charming retreat by Bendemeer's Stream.

VI.

LEE, THE LETTER-MAN.

IN a side lane of Timberdale, just off the churchyard, was the cottage of Jael Batty, whose name you have heard before. Side by side with it stood another cottage, inhabited by Lee, the assistant letter-carrier; or, as Timberdale generally called him, the letter-man. These cottages had a lively look-out, the farrier's shop and a few thatched hayricks opposite; sideways, the tombstones in the graveyard.

Some men are lucky in life, others are unlucky. Andrew Lee was in the latter category. He had begun life as a promising farmer, but came down in the world. First of all, he had to pay a heap of money for some man who had persuaded him to become his security, and that stripped him of his means. Afterwards a series of ill-fortune set in on the farm: crops failed, cattle died, and Lee was sold up. Since then, he had tried at this and tried at that; been in turn a farmer's labourer, an agent for coal, and the proprietor of a shop devoted to the benefit

of the younger members of the community, its speciality being bull's-eyes and besoms for birch-rods. For some few years now he had settled down in this cottage next door to Jael Batty's, and carried out the letters at fourteen shillings a week.

There were two letter-men, Spicer and Lee. But there need not have been two, only that Timberdale was so straggling a parish, the houses in it lying far and wide. Like other things in this world, fortune, even in so trifling a matter as these two postmen, was not dealt out equally. Spicer had the least work, for he took the home delivery, and had the most pay; Lee did all the country tramping, and had only the fourteen shillings. But when the place was offered to Lee he was at a very low ebb indeed and took it thankfully, and thought he was set up in riches for life; for, as you well know, we estimate things by contrast.

Andrew Lee was not unlucky in his fortunes only. Of his three children, not any one had prospered. The son married all too young; within a year he and his wife were both dead, leaving a baby-boy to Lee as a legacy. The elder daughter had emigrated to the other end of the world with her husband; and the younger daughter had a history. She was pretty and good and gentle, but just a goose. Goose that she was, though, all the parish liked Mamie Lee.

About four years before the time I am telling of, there came a soldier to Timberdale, on a visit to Spicer the letter-carrier, one James West. He was related to Spicer's wife; her nephew, or cousin, or something of that; a tall, good-looking, merry-tempered dragoon, with a dashing carriage and a dashing tongue; and he ran away with the heart of Mamie Lee. That might not so much have mattered in the long-run, for such privilege is universally allowed to the sons of Mars; but he also ran away with her. One fine morning Mr. James West was missing from Timberdale, and Mamie Lee was missing also. The parish went into a rapture of indignation over it, not so much at him as at her; called her a "baggage," and hoping her folly would come home to her. Poor old Lee thought he had got his death-blow, and his hair turned grey swiftly.

Not more than twelve months had gone by when Mamie was back again. Jael Batty was running out one evening to get half a pound of sugar at Salmon's shop, when she met a young woman with a bundle staggering down the lane, and keeping under the side of the hedge as if she were afraid of falling, or else did not want to be seen. Too weak to carry the bundle, she seemed ready to sink at every step. Jael Batty, who had her curiosity like other people, though she was deaf, peered into the bent face, and brought herself up with a shriek.

"What, is it you, Mamie Lee! Well, the impedence of this! How on earth could you pick up the brass to come back here?"

"Are my poor father and mother alive? Do they still live here?" faltered Mamie, turning her piteous white face to Jael.

"They be, both alive; but it's no thanks to you. If they——Oh, if I don't believe—What have you got in that ragged old shawl?"

"It's my baby," answered Mamie; and she passed on.

Andrew Lee took her in amidst sobs and tears, and thanked Heaven she was come back, and welcomed her unreasonably. The parish went on at him for it, showering down plenty of abuse, and asking whether he did not feel ashamed of himself. There was even a talk of his post as letter-carrier being taken from him; but it came to nothing. Rymer was postmaster then, though he was about giving it up; and he was a man of too much sorrow himself to inflict it needlessly upon another. On the contrary, he sent down cordials and tonics and things for Mamie, who had had a fever and come home dilapidated as to strength, and never charged for them. Thomas Rymer's own heart was slowly breaking, so he could feel for her.

The best or the worst of it was, that Mamie said she was married. Which assertion was of course not believed, and only added to her sin in the eyes of Timberdale. The tale she told

was this. That James West had taken her straight to some town, where he had previously had the banns put up, and married her there. The day after the marriage they had sailed for Ireland, whither he had to hasten to join his regiment, his leave of absence having expired. At the end of some seven or eight months, the regiment was ordered to India, and he departed with it, leaving her in her obscure lodging at Cork. By-and-by her baby was born; she was very ill then, very; had fever and a cough, and sundry other complications; and what with lying ill eight weeks, and being obliged to pay a doctor and a nurse all that while, besides other expenses, she spent all the money Mr. James West left with her, and had no choice between starvation and coming back to Timberdale.

You should have heard how this account was scoffed at. The illness, and the baby, and the poverty nobody disputed—they were plain enough to be seen by all Timberdale; and what better could she expect, they'd like to know? But when she came to talk about the church (or rather, old Lee for her, second-hand, for she was not at all a person now to be spoken to by Timberdale), then their tongues were let loose in all kinds of inconvenient questions. *Which* was the town?—and which was the church in it?—and where were her "marriage lines"? Mamie could give no answer at all. She did not know the name of the town, or where it was

situated. James had taken her with him in the train to it, and that was all she knew; and she did not know the name of the church or the clergyman; and as to marriage lines, she had never heard of any. So, as Timberdale said, what could you make out of this, save one thing —that Mr. Jim West had been a deep rogue, and taken her in. At best, it could have been but a factitious ceremony; perhaps in some barn, got up like a church for the occasion, said the more tolerant, willing to give excuse for pretty Mamie if they could; but the chief portion of Timberdale looked upon the whole as an out-and-out invention of her own.

Poor Andrew Lee had never taken a hopeful view of the affair from the first; but he held to the more tolerant opinion that Mamie had been herself deceived, and he could not help being cool to Spicer in consequence. Spicer in retaliation threw all the blame upon Mamie, and held up Mr. James West as a shining paragon of virtue.

But, as the time went on, and no news, no letter or other token arrived from West, Mamie herself gave in. That he had deceived her she slowly became convinced of, and despair took hold of her heart. Timberdale might have the satisfaction of knowing that she judged herself just as humbly and bitterly as they judged her, and was grieving herself to a shadow. Three years had passed now since her return, and the

affair was an event of the past; and Mamie wore, metaphorically, the white sheet of penitence, and hardly dared to show her face outside the cottage-door.

But you may easily see how all this, besides the sorrow, told upon Lee. Fourteen shillings a week for a man and his wife to exist upon cannot be called much, especially if they have seen better days and been used to better living. When the first grandchild, poor little orphan, arrived to be kept, Lee and his wife both thought it hard, though quite willing to take him; and now they had Mamie and another grandchild. This young one was named Jemima, for Mamie had called her after her faithless husband. Five people and fourteen shillings a week, and provisions dear, and house-rent to pay, and Lee's shoes perpetually wanting to be mended! One or two generous individuals grew rather fond of telling Lee that he would be better off in the union.

It was November weather. A cold, dark, biting, sharp, drizzly morning. Andrew Lee got up betimes, as usual: he had to be out soon after seven to be ready for his letter delivery. In the kitchen when he entered it, he found his daughter there before him, coaxing the kettle to boil on the handful of fire, that she might make him his cup of tea and give him his breakfast. She was getting uncommonly weak and shadowy-looking now: a little woman, not

much more yet than a girl, with a shawl folded about her shivering shoulders, a hacking cough, and a mild, nonresisting face. Her father had lately told her that he would not have her get up in a morning; she was not fit for it: what he wanted done, he could do himself.

"Now, Mamie, why are you here? You should attend to what I say, child."

She got up from her knees and turned her sad brown eyes towards him: bright and sweet eyes once, but now dimmed with the tears and sorrow of the last three years.

"I am better up; I am indeed, father. Not sleeping much, I get tired of lying: and my cough is worse a-bed."

He sat down to his cup of tea and to the bread she placed before him. Some mornings there was a little butter, or dripping, or mayhap bacon fat; but this morning he had to eat his bread dry. It was getting near the end of the week, and the purse ran low. Lee had a horror of debt, and would never let his people run into it for the smallest sum if he knew it.

"It's poor fare for you this morning, father; but I'll try and get a morsel of boiled pork for dinner, and we'll have it ready early. I expect to be paid to-day for the bit of work I have been doing for young Mrs. Ashton. Some of those greens down by the apple-trees want cutting: they'll be nice with a bit of pork."

Lee turned his eyes in the direction of the

greens and the apple-trees; but the window was misty, and he could only see the drizzle of rain-drops on the diamond panes. As he sat there, a thought came into his head that he was beginning to feel old: old, and worn, and shaky. Trouble ages a man more than work, more than time; and Lee never looked at the wan face of his daughter, and at its marks of sad repentance, but he felt anew the sting which was always pricking him more or less. What with that, and his difficulty to keep the pot boiling, and his general state of shakiness, Lee was older than his years. Timberdale had got into the habit of calling him Old Lee, you see; but he was not sixty yet. He had a nice face; when it was a young face it must have been like Mamie's. It had furrows in it now, and his scanty grey locks hung down on each side of it.

Putting on his top-coat, which was about as thin as those remarkable sheets told of by Brian O'Linn, Lee went out buttoning it. The rain had ceased, but the cold wind took him as he went down the narrow garden-path, and he could not help shivering.

"It's a bitter wind to-day, father; in the north-east, I think," said Mamie, standing at the door to shut it after him. "I hope there'll be no letters for Crabb."

Lee, as he pressed along in the teeth of the cruel wind, was hoping the same. Salmon the grocer, who had taken the post-office, as may be

remembered, when the late Thomas Rymer gave it up, was sorting the letters in the room behind the shop when Lee went in. Spicer, a lithe, active, dark-eyed man of forty-five, stood at the end of the table waiting for his bag. Lee went and stood beside him, giving him a brief good-morning: he had not taken kindly to the man since West ran away with Mamie.

"A light load this morning," remarked Mr. Salmon to Spicer, as he handed him his appropriate bag. "And here's yours, Lee," he added a minute after: "not heavy either. Too cold for people to write, I suppose."

"Anything for Crabb, sir?"

"For Crabb? Well, yes, I think there is. For the Rector."

Upon going out, Spicer turned one way, Lee the other. Spicer's district was easy as play; Lee's was a regular country tramp, the farm-houses lying in all the four points of the compass. The longest tramp was over to us at Crabb. And why the two houses, our own and Coney's farm, should continue to be comprised in the Timberdale delivery, instead of that of Crabb, people could never understand. It was so still, however, and nobody bestirred himself to alter it. For one thing, we were not often at Crabb Cot, and the Coneys did not have many letters, so it was not like an every-day delivery: we chanced to be there just now.

The letter spoken of by Salmon, which would

bring Lee to Crabb this morning, was for the Reverend Herbert Tanerton, Rector of Timberdale. He and his wife, who was a niece of old Coney's, were now staying at the farm on a week's visit, and he had given orders to Salmon that his letters, during that week, were to be delivered at the farm instead of at the rectory.

Lee finally got through his work, all but this one letter for the parson, and turned his steps our way. As ill-luck had it—the poor fellow thought it so afterwards—he could not take the short and sheltered way through Crabb Ravine, for he had letters that morning to Sir Robert Tenby, at Bellwood, and also for the Stone House on the way to it. By the time he turned on the solitary road that led to Crabb, Lee was nearly blown to smithereens by the fierce north-east wind, and chilled to the marrow. All his bones ached; he felt low, frozen, ill, and wondered whether he should get over the ground without breaking down.

"I wish I might have a whiff at my pipe!"

A pipe is to many people the panacea for all earthly discomfort; it was so to Lee. But only in the previous February had occurred that damage to Helen Whitney's letter, when she was staying with us, which the authorities had made much of; and Lee was afraid to risk a similar mishap again. He carried Salmon's general orders with him: not to smoke during

his round. Once the letters were delivered, he might do so.

His weak grey hair blowing about, his thin and shrunken frame shivering and shaking as the blasts took him, his empty post-bag thrust into his pocket, and the Rector of Timberlale's letter in his hand, Lee toiled along on his weary way. To a strong man the walk would have been nothing, and not much to Lee in fairer weather. It was the cold and wind that tired him. And though, after giving vent to the above wish, he held out a little while, presently he could resist the comfort no longer, but drew forth his pipe and struck a match to light it.

How it occurred he never knew, never knew to his dying day; but the flame from the match caught the letter, and set it alight. It was that thin foreign paper that catches so quickly, and the match was obstinate, and the wind blew the flame about. He pressed the fire out with his hands, but a portion of the letter was burnt.

If Timbuctoo, or some other far-away place had been within the distance of a man's legs, Lee would have made straight off for it. His pipe on the ground, the burnt letter underneath his horrified gaze, and his hair raised on end, stood he. What on earth should he do? It had been only a pleasant young lady's letter last time, and only a little scorched; now it was the stern Rector's.

There was but one thing he could do—go on

with the letter to its destination. It often happens in these distressing catastrophes that the one only course open is the least palatable. His pipe hidden away in his pocket —for Lee had had enough of it for that morning—and the damaged letter humbly held out in his hand, Lee made his approach to the farm.

I chanced to be standing at its door with Tom Coney and Tod. Those two were going out shooting, and the Squire had sent me running across the road with a message to them. Lee came up, and, with a face that seemed greyer than usual, and a voice from which most of its sound had departed, he told his tale.

Tom Coney gave a whistle. "Oh, by George, Lee, won't you catch it! The Rector——"

"The Rector's a regular Martinet, you know," Tom Coney was about to add, but he was stopped by the appearance of the Rector himself.

Herbert Tanerton had chanced to be in the little oak-panelled hall and caught the drift of the tale. A frown sat on his cold face as he came forward, a frown that would have befitted an old face better than a young one.

He was not loud. He did not fly into a passion as Helen Whitney did. He just took the unfortunate letter in his hand, and looked at it, and looked at Lee, and spoke quietly and coldly.

"This is, I believe, the second time you have burnt the letters?" and Lee dared not deny it.

"And in direct defiance of orders. You are not allowed to smoke when on your rounds."

"I'll never attempt to smoke again, when on my round, as long as I live, sir, if you'll only be pleased to look over it this time," gasped Lee, holding up his hands in a piteous way. But the Rector was one who went in for "duty," and the appeal found no favour with him.

"No," said he, "it would be to encourage wrong-doing, Lee. Meet me at eleven o'clock at Salmon's."

"Never again, sir, as long as I live!" pleaded Lee. "I'll give you my word of that, sir; and I never broke it yet. Oh, sir, if you will but have pity upon me, and not report me!"

"At eleven o'clock," repeated Herbert Tanerton decisively, as he turned indoors again.

"What an old stupid you must be!" cried Tod to Lee. "He won't excuse you; he's the wrong sort of parson to do it."

"And a pretty kettle of fish you've made of it!" added Tom Coney. "I'd not have minded much, had it been my letter; but he is different, you know."

Poor Lee turned his eyes on me: perhaps remembering that he had asked me, the other time, to stand his friend with Miss Whitney. Nobody could be his friend now: when the Rector took up a grievance he did not let it go

again; especially if it were his own. Good-hearted Jack, his sailor-brother, would have screened Lee, though all the letters in the parish had got burnt.

At eleven o'clock precisely the Reverend Herbert Tanerton entered Salmon's shop; and poor Lee, not daring to disobey his mandate, crept in after him. They had it out in the room behind. Salmon was properly severe; told Lee he was not sure but the offence involved penal servitude, and that he deserved hanging. A prosperous tradesman in his small orbit, the man was naturally inclined to be dictatorial, and was ambitious of standing well with his betters, especially the Rector. Lee was suspended there and then; and Spicer was informed that for a time, until other arrangements were made, he must do double duty. Spicer, vexed at this, for it would take him so much the more time from his legitimate business, that of horse doctor, told Lee he was a fool, and deserved not only hanging but drawing and quartering.

"What's up?" asked Ben Rymer, crossing the road from his own shop to accost Lee, as the latter came out of Salmon's. Ben was the chemist now—had been since Margaret's marriage—and was steady; and Ben, it was said, would soon pass his examination for surgeon. He had his hands in his pockets and his white apron on, for Mr. Ben Rymer had no false

pride, and would as soon show himself to Timberdale in an apron as in a dress-coat.

Lee told his tale, confessing the sin of the morning. Mr. Rymer nodded his head significantly several times as he heard it, and pushed his red hair from his capacious forehead.

"They'll not look over it this time, Lee."

"If I could but get some one to be my friend with the Rector, and ask him to forgive me," said Lee. "Had your father been alive, Mr. Rymer, I think he would have done it for me."

"Very likely. No good to ask me—if that's what you are hinting at. The Rector looks upon me as a black sheep and turns on me the cold shoulder. But I don't think he is one to listen, Lee, though the King came to ask him."

"What I shall do I don't know," bewailed Lee. "If the place is stopped, the pay stops, and I've not another shilling in the world, or the means of earning one. My wife's ailing, and Mamie gets worse day by day; and there are the two little ones. They are all upon me."

"Some people here say, Lee, that you should have sent Mamie and her young one to the workhouse, and not have charged yourself with them."

"True, sir, several have told me that. But people don't know what a father's feelings are till they experience them. Mary was my own child that I had dandled on my knee, and watched grow up in her pretty ways, and I was

fonder of her than any earthly thing. The workhouse might not have taken her in."

"She had forfeited all claim on you. And come home only to break your heart."

"True," meekly assented Lee. "But the Lord has told us we are to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven. If I had turned her adrift from my door and heart, sir, who knows but I might have been driven adrift myself at the Last Day."

Evidently it was of no use talking to one so unreasonable as Lee. And Mr. Ben Rymer turned back to his shop. A customer was entering it with a prescription and a medicine bottle.

One morning, close upon Christmas, Mrs. Todhetley despatched me to Timberdale through the snow for a box of those delectable "Household Pills" which have been mentioned before: an invention of the late Mr. Rymer's, and continued to be made up by Ben. Ben was behind the counter as usual, when I entered, and shook the snow off my boots on the door-mat.

"Anything else?" he asked me presently, wrapping up the box.

"Not to-day. There goes old Lee! How thin he looks!"

"Starvation," said Ben, craning his long neck to look between the coloured globes at Lee on

the other side the way. "Lee has nothing coming in now."

"What do they all live upon?"

"Goodness knows. Upon things that he pledges, and the vegetables in the garden. I was in there last night, and I can tell you it was a picture, Mr. Johnny Ludlow."

"A picture of what?"

"Misery: distress: hopelessness. It is several weeks now since Lee earned anything, and they have been all that while upon short commons. Some days on no commons at all, I expect."

"But what took you there?"

"I heard such an account of the girl—Mamie—yesterday afternoon; of her cough and her weakness; that I thought I'd see if any of my drugs would do her good. But it's food they all want."

"Is Mamie very ill?"

"Very ill indeed. I'm not sure but she's dying."

"It is a dreadful thing."

"One can't ask too many professional questions—people are down upon you for that before you have passed," resumed Ben, alluding to his not being qualified. "But I sent her in a cordial or two, and I spoke to Darbyshire; so perhaps he will look in upon her to-day."

Ben Rymer might have been a black sheep once upon a time, but he had not a bad heart.

I began wondering whether Mrs. Todhetley could help them.

"Is Mamie Lee still able to do any sewing?"

"About as much as I could do it. Not she. I shall hear what Darbyshire's report is. They would certainly be better off in the workhouse."

"I wish they could be helped!"

"Not much chance of that," said Ben. "She is a sinner, and he is a sinner: that's what Timberdale says, you know. People in these enlightened days are so very self-righteous!"

"How is Lee a sinner?"

"How! Why, has he not burnt up the public's letters? Mr. Tanerton leads the van in banning him, and Timberdale follows."

I went home, questioning whether our folks would do anything to help the Lees. Nobody called out against ill-doings worse than the Squire; and nobody was more ready than he to lend a helping hand when the ill-doers were fainting for lack of it.

It chanced that, just about the time I was talking to Ben Rymer, Mr. Darbyshire, the doctor at Timberdale, called at Lee's. He was a little, dark man, with an irritable temper and a turned-up nose, but good as gold at heart. Mamie Lee lay back in a chair, her head on a pillow, weak and wan and weary, the tears slowly rolling down her cheeks. Darbyshire was feeling her pulse, and old Mrs. Lee pottered about, bringing sticks from the garden to feed

the handful of fire. The two children sat on the brick floor.

"If it were not for leaving my poor little one, I should be glad to die, sir," she was saying. "I shall be glad to go: I hope it is not wrong to say it. She and I have been a dreadful charge upon them here."

Darbyshire looked round the kitchen. It was nearly bare: the things had gone to the pawnbroker's. Then he looked at her.

"There's no need for you to die yet. Don't get that fallacy in your head. You'll come round fast enough with a little care."

"No, sir, I'm afraid not; I think I am past it. It has all come of the trouble, sir; and perhaps when I'm gone, the neighbours will judge me more charitably. I believed with all my heart it was a true marriage—and I hope you'll believe me when I say it, sir; it never came into my mind to imagine otherwise. And I'd have thought the whole world would have deceived me, sooner than James."

"Ah," says Darbyshire, "most girls think that. Well, I'll send you in some physic to soothe the pain in the chest. But what you most want, you see, is kitchen physic."

"Mr. Rymer has been very good in sending me cordials and cough-mixture, sir. Mother's cough is bad, and he sent some to her as well."

"Ah, yes. Mrs. Lee, I am telling your daughter that what she most wants is kitchen

physic. Good kitchen physic, you understand. You'd be none the worse yourself for some of it."

Dame Lee, coming in just then in her pattens, tried to put her poor bent back as upright as she could, and shook her head before answering.

"Kitchen physic don't come in our way now, Dr. Darbyshire. We just manage not to starve quite, and that's all. Perhaps, sir, things may take a turn. The Lord is over all, and He sees our need."

"He dave me some pep'mint d'ops," said the little one, who had been waiting to put in her word. "Andy, too."

"Who did?" asked the doctor.

"Mr. 'Ymer."

Darbyshire patted the little straw-coloured head, and went out. An additional offence in the eyes of Timberdale was that the child's fair curls were just the pattern of those on the head of James the deceiver.

"Well, have you seen Mamie Lee?" asked Ben Rymer, who chanced to be standing at his shop-door after his dinner, when Darbyshire was passing by from paying his round of visits.

"Yes, I have seen her. There's no radical disease."

"Don't you think her uncommonly ill?"

Darbyshire nodded. "But she's not too far gone to be cured. She'd get well fast enough under favourable circumstances."

"Meaning good food?"

"Meaning food and other things. Peace of mind, for instance. She is just fretting herself to death. Shame, remorse, and all that, have got hold of her; besides grieving her heart out after the fellow."

"Her voice is so hollow! Did you notice it?"

"Hollow from weakness only. As to her being too far gone, she is not at present; at least, that's my opinion; but how soon she may become so I can't say. With good kitchen physic, as I've just told them, and ease of mind to help me, I'll answer for it that I'd have her well in a month; but the girl has neither the one nor the other. She seems to look upon coming death in the light of a relief, rather than otherwise; a relief to her own mental trouble, and a relief to the household, in the shape of saving it what she eats and drinks. In such a condition as this, you must be aware that the mind does not help the body by striving for existence, it makes no effort to struggle back to health; and there's where Mamie Lee will fail. Circumstances are killing her, not the disease."

"Did you try her lungs?"

"Partially. I'm sure I am right. The girl will probably die, but she need not die of necessity; though I suppose there will be no help for it. Good-day."

Mr. Darbyshire walked away in the direction of his house, where his dinner was waiting: and

Ben Rymer disappeared within doors, and began to pound some rhubarb (or what looked like it) in a mortar. He was pounding away like mad, with all the strength of his strong hands, when who should come in but Lee. Lee had never been much better than a shadow of late years, but you should have seen him now, with his grey hair straggling about his meek, wan face. You should have seen his clothes, too, and the old shoes out at the toes and sides. Burning people's letters was of course an unpardonable offence, not to be condoned.

"Mamie said, sir, that you were good enough to tell her I was to call in for some of the cough lozenges that did her so much good. But——"

"Ay," interrupted Ben, getting down a box of the lozenges. "Don't let her spare them. They'll not interfere with anything Mr. Darbyshire may send. I hear he has been."

But that those were not the days when beef-tea was sold in tins and gallipots, Ben Rymer might have added some to the lozenges. As he was handing the box to Lee, something in the man's wan and worn and gentle face put him in mind of his late father's, whose heart Mr. Ben had helped to break. A great pity took the chemist.

"You would like to be reinstated in your place, Lee?" he said suddenly.

Lee could not answer at once, for the pain at his throat and the moisture in his eyes that the

notion called up. His voice, when he did speak, was as hollow and mild as Mamie's.

"There's no hope of that, sir. For a week after it was taken from me, I thought of nothing else, night or day, but that Mr. Tanerton might perhaps forgive me and get Salmon to put me on again. But the time for hoping that went by: as you know, Mr. Rymer, they put young Jelf in my place. I shall never forget the blow it was to me when I heard it. The other morning I saw Jelf crossing that bit of waste ground yonder with my old bag slung on his shoulder, and for a moment I thought the pain would have killed me."

"It is hard lines," confessed Ben.

"I have striven and struggled all my life long; only myself knows how sorely, save God; and only He can tell, for I am sure I can't, how I have contrived to keep my head any way above water. And now it's under it."

Taking the box, which Ben Rymer handed to him, Lee spoke a word of thanks, and went out. He could not say much; heart and spirit were alike broken. Ben called to his boy to mind the shop, and went over to Salmon's. That self-sufficient man and prosperous tradesman was sitting down at his desk in the shop-corner, complacently digesting his dinner—which had been a good one, to judge by his red face.

"Can't you manage to do something for Lee?"

began Ben, after looking to see that they were alone. "He is at a rare low ebb."

"Do something for Lee?" repeated Salmon. "What could I do for him?"

"Put him in his place again."

"I dare say!" Salmon laughed as he spoke, and then demanded whether Ben was a fool.

"You might do it if you would," said Ben. "As to Lee, he won't last long, if things continue to be as they are. Better give him a chance to live a little longer."

"Now what do you mean?" demanded Salmon. "Why don't you ask me to put a weathercock on yonder malt-house of Pashley's? Jelf has got Lee's place, and you know it."

"But Jelf does not intend to keep it."

"Who says he does not?"

"He says it. He told me yesterday that he was sick and tired of the tramping, and meant to resign. He only took it as a temporary convenience, while he waited for a clerkship he was trying for at a brewery at Worcester. And he is to get that with the new year."

"Then what does Jelf mean by talking about it to others before he has spoken to me?" cried Salmon, going into a temper. "He thought to leave me and the letters at a pinch, I suppose! I'll teach him better."

"You may teach him anything you like, if you'll put Lee on again. I'll go bail that he won't get smoking again on his rounds. I think

it is just a toss-up of life or death to him. Come! do a good turn for once, Salmon."

Salmon paused. He was not bad-hearted, only self-important.

"What would Mr. Tanerton say to it?"

Ben did not answer. He knew that there, after Salmon himself, was where the difficulty would lie.

"All that you have been urging goes for nonsense, Rymer. Unless the Rector came to me and said, 'You may put Lee on again,' I should not, and could not, attempt to stir in the matter; and you must know that as well as I do."

"Can't somebody see Tanerton, and talk to him? One would think that the sight of Lee's face would be enough to soften him, without anything else."

"I don't know who'd like to do it," returned Salmon. And there the conference ended, for the apprentice came in from his dinner.

Very much to our surprise, Mr. Ben Rymer walked in that same evening to Crabb Cot, and was admitted to the Squire. In spite of Mr. Ben's former ill-doings, which he had got to know of, the Squire treated Ben civilly, in remembrance of his father, and of his grandfather, the clergyman. Ben's errand was to ask the Squire to intercede for Lee with Herbert Tanerton. And the Pater, after talking largely about the iniquity of Lee, as connected with burnt

letters, came round to Ben's way of thinking, and agreed to go to the rectory.

"Herbert Tanerton's harder than nails, and you'll do no good," remarked Tod, watching us away on the following morning; for the Pater took me with him to break the loneliness of the walk. "He'll turn as cold to you as a stone the moment you bring up the subject, sir. Tell me I'm a story-teller when you come back if he does not, Johnny."

We took the way of the Ravine. It was a searching day; the wintry wind keen and "unkind as man's ingratitude." Before us, toiling up the descent to the Ravine at the other end, and coming to a halt at the stile to pant and cough, went a wobegone figure, thinly clad, which turned out to be Lee himself. He had a small bundle of loose sticks in his hand, which he had come to pick up. The Squire was preparing a kind of blowing-up greeting for him, touching lighted matches and carelessness, but the sight of the mild, starved grey face disarmed him; he thought, instead, of the days when Lee had been a prosperous farmer, and his tone changed to one of pity.

"Hard times, I'm afraid, Lee."

"Yes, sir, very hard. I've known hard times before, but I never thought to see any so cruel as these. There's one comfort, sir; when things come to this low ebb, life can't last long."

"Stuff," said the Squire. "For all you know, you may be back in your old place soon: and —and Mrs. Todhetley will find some sewing when Mamie's well enough to do it."

A faint light, the dawn-ray of hope, shone in Lee's eyes. "Oh, sir, if it could be!—and I heard a whisper to-day that young Jelf refuses to keep the post. If it had been anybody's letter but Mr. Tanerton's, perhaps—but he does not forgive."

"I'm on my way now to ask him to," cried the Pater, unable to keep in the news. "Cheer up, Lee—of course you'd pass your word not to go burning letters again."

"I'd not expose myself to the danger, sir. Once I got my old place back, I would never take out a pipe with me on my rounds; never, so long as I live."

Leaving him with his new hope and the bundle of firewood, we trudged on to the rectory. Herbert and Grace were both at home, and glad to see us.

But the interview ended in smoke. Tod had foreseen the result exactly: the Rector was harder than nails. He talked of "example" and "Christian duty;" and refused point-blank to allow Lee to be reinstated. The Squire gave him a few sharp words, and flung out of the house in a passion.

"A pretty Christian *he* is, Johnny! He was cold and hard as a boy. I once told him so

before his stepfather, poor Jacob Lewis; but he is colder and harder now."

At the turning of the road by Timberdale Court, we came upon Lee. After taking his faggots home, he waited about to see us and hear the news. The Pater's face, red and angry, told him the truth.

"There's no hope for me, sir, I fear?"

"Not a bit of it," growled the Squire. "Mr. Tanerton won't listen to reason. Perhaps we can find some other light post for you, my poor fellow, when the winter shall have turned. You had better get indoors out of this biting cold; and here's a couple of shillings."

So hope went clean out of Andrew Lee.

Christmas Day and jolly weather. Snow on the ground to one's heart's content. Holly and ivy on the walls indoors, and great fires blazing on the hearths; turkeys, and plum-puddings, and oranges, and fun. *That* was our lucky state at Crabb Cot and at Timberdale generally, but not at Andrew Lee's.

The sweet bells were chiming people out of church, as was the custom at Timberdale on high festivals. Poor Lee sat listening to them, his hand held up to his aching head. There had been no church for him: he had neither clothes to go in nor face to sit through the service. Mamie, wrapped in an old bed-quilt, lay back on the pillow by the fire. The coal

merchant, opening his heart, had sent a sack each of best Staffordshire coal to ten poor families, and Lee's was one. Except the Squire's two shillings, he had had no money given to him. A loaf of bread was in the cupboard; and a saucepan of broth, made of carrots and turnips out of the garden, simmered on the trivet; and that would be their Christmas dinner.

Uncommonly low was Mamie to-day. The longer she endured this famished state of affairs the weaker she got; it stands to reason. She felt that a few days, perhaps hours, would finish her up. The little ones were upstairs with their grandmother, so that she had an interval of rest; and she lay back, her breath short and her chest aching as she thought of the past. Of the time when James West, the handsome young man in his gay regimentals, came to woo her, as the soldier did the miller's daughter. In those happy days, when her heart was light and her song blithe as a bird's in May, that used to be one of her songs, "The Banks of Allan Water." Her dream had come to the same ending as the one told of in the ballad, and here she lay, deserted and dying. Timberdale was in the habit of prosaically telling her that she had "brought her pigs to a fine market." Of the market there could be no question; but when Mamie looked into the past she saw more of romance than pigs. The

breaking out of the church bells forced a rush of tears to her heart and eyes. She tried to battle with the feeling, then turned and put her cheek against her father's shoulder.

"Forgive me, father!" she besought him, in a sobbing whisper. "I don't think it will be long now; I want you to say you forgive me before I go. If—if you can."

And the words finished up for Lee what the bells had only partly done. He broke down, and sobbed with his daughter.

"I've never thought there was need of it, or to say it, child; and if there had been—— Christ forgave all. 'Peace on earth and goodwill to men.' The bells are ringing it out now. He will soon take us to Him, Mamie, my forlorn one: forgiven; yes, forgiven; and in His beautiful world there is neither hunger, nor disgrace, nor pain. You are dying of that cold you caught in the autumn, and I shan't be long behind you. There's no longer any place for me here."

"Not of the cold, father; I am not dying of that, but of a broken heart."

Lee sobbed. He did not answer.

"And I should like to leave my forgiveness to James, should he ever come back here," she whispered: "and—and my love. Please tell him that I'd have got well if I could, if only for the chance of seeing him once again in this world; and tell him that I have thought all

along there must be some mistake; that he did not mean deliberately to harm me. I think so still, father. And if he should notice little Mima, please tell him——"

A paroxysm of coughing interrupted the rest Mrs. Lee came downstairs with the children asking if it was not time for dinner.

"The little ones are crying out for it, Mamie, and I'm sure the rest of us are hungry enough."

So they bestirred themselves to take up the broth, and to take seats round the table. All but Mamie, who did not leave her pillow. Very watery broth, the carrots and turnips swimming in it.

"Say grace, Andy," cried his grandmother.

For they kept up proper manners at Lee's, in spite of the short commons.

"For what we are going to receive," began Andy: and then he pulled himself up, and looked round.

Bursting in at the door, a laugh upon his face and a white basin in his hands, came Mr. Ben Rymer. The basin was three parts filled with delicious slices of hot roast beef and gravy.

"I thought you might like to eat a bit, as it's Christmas Day," said Ben. "And here's an orange or two for you youngsters."

Pulling the oranges out of his pocket, and not waiting to be thanked, Ben went off again. But he did not tell them what he was laughing at, or the trick he had played his mother—in

slicing away at the round of beef, and rifling the dish of oranges, while her back was turned, looking after the servant's doings in the kitchen, and the turning-out of the pudding. For Mrs. Rymer followed Timberdale in taking an exaggerated view of Lee's sins, and declined to help him.

Their faces had hardly done shining with the unusual luxury of the beef, when I dropped in. We had gone that day to church at Timberdale; after the service, the Squire left the others to walk on, and, taking me with him, called at the rectory to tackle Herbert Tanerton again. The parson did not hold out. How could he, with those bells, enjoining goodwill, ringing in his ears?—the bells of his own church. But he had meant to come round of his own accord.

"I'll see Salmon about it to-morrow," said he. "I did say just a word to him, yesterday. As you go home, Johnny may look in at Lee's and tell him so."

"And Johnny, if you don't mind carrying it, I'll send a drop of beef-tea to Mamie," whispered Grace: "I've not dared to do it before."

So, when it was getting towards dusk, for the Squire stayed, talking of this and that, there I was, with the bottle of beef-tea, telling Lee the good news that his place would be restored to him with the new year, and hearing about Ben Rymer's basin of meat. The tears rolled down old Lee's haggard cheeks.

"And I had been fearing that God had abandoned me!" he cried, full of remorse for the doubt. "Mamie, perhaps you can struggle on a bit longer now."

But the greatest event of all was to come. While I stood there, somebody opened the door, and looked in. A tall, fine, handsome soldier: and I did not at the moment notice that he had a wooden leg from the knee downwards. Ben's basin of beef had been a surprise, but it was nothing to this. Taking a glance round the room, it rested on Mamie, and he went up to her, the smile on his open face changing to concern.

"My dear lassie, what's amiss?"

"James!" she faintly screamed; "it's James!" and burst into a fit of sobs on his breast. And next the company was augmented by Salmon and Ben Rymer, who had seen James West go by, and came after him to know what it meant, and to blow him up for his delinquencies.

"Mamie not married!" laughed James. "Timberdale has been saying that? Why, what extraordinary people you must be! We were married at Bristol—and I've got the certificate in my knapsack at Spicer's: I've always kept it. You can paste it up on the church-door if you like. Not married! Would Mamie else have gone with me, do you suppose? Or should I have taken her?"

"But," said poor Lee, thinking that heaven

must have opened right over his head that afternoon to shower down gifts, "why did you not marry her here openly?"

"Because I could not get leave to marry openly. We soldiers cannot marry at will, you know, Mr. Lee. I ought not to have done it, that's a fact; but I did not care to leave Mamie, I liked her too well; and I was punished afterwards by not being allowed to take her to India."

"You never wrote, James," whispered Mamie.

"Yes, I did, dear; I wrote twice to Ireland, not knowing you had left it. That was at first, just after we landed. Soon we had a skirmish with the natives out there, and I got shot in the leg and otherwise wounded; and for a long time I lay between life and death, only partly conscious; and now I am discharged with a pension and a wooden leg."

"Then you can't go for a soldier again!" cried Salmon.

"Not I. I shall settle at Timberdale, I think, if I can meet with a pretty little place to suit me. I found my poor mother dead when I came home, and what was hers is now mine. And it will be a comfortable living for us, Mamie, of itself: besides a few spare hundred pounds to the good, some of which you shall be heartily welcome to, Mr. Lee, for you look as if you wanted it. And the first thing I shall do, Mamie, my dear, will be to nurse you back to health. Bless my heart! Not married! I

wish I had the handling of him that first set that idea afloat!"

"You'll get well now, Mamie," I whispered to her. For she was looking better already.

"Oh, Master Johnny, perhaps I shall! How good God is to us! And, James—James, this is the little one. I named her after you: Jemima."

"Peace on earth, and goodwill to men!" cried old Lee, in his thankfulness. "The bells said it to-day."

And as I made off at last to catch up the Squire, the little Mima was being smothered with kisses in her father's arms.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men!" To every one of us, my friends, do the Christmas bells say it, as Christmas Day comes round.

THE END.

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